MIDNIGHT MARQUEE

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MIDNIGHT MARQUEE

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FRONT COVER: David L. Daniels, using acrylics and airbrush, recreates Bela Lugosi from **The Mark of the Vampire**; INSIDE FRONT: David L. Daniels using the airbrush again, recreates the Mistress of the Dark, Elvira; INSIDE BACK: Utilizing a highly stylized pen and ink format, Robert Knox creates impressions of Bela Lugosi from **White Zombie**; BACK COVER: Allen Koszowski, working with colored pencils, recreates the Melting Man sequence from **Raiders of the Lost Ark**

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to issue #42 of *Midnight Marquee*, the longest running small-press magazine devoted to horror, fantasy, and science fiction film (28 years and running).

You may have noticed how radically different the appearance and design of this Contents page looks compared to the rest of the interior pages. Let's call this a "sneak preview" of technology to come. Beginning with our next issue, *Midnight Marquee* will be entirely designed and executed on an Apple Macintosh computer which is currently state-of-the-art desktop publishing. Besides the obvious professional appearance and true type-setting which the Mac provides, many other advantages exist. For instance, we will be able to offer small yet very readable text which actually allows us to squeeze more material onto each individual page. Thus, the reader will actually get more magazine in the same amount of pages.

But, the outward typography and design is not the only change we are making here at *MidMar*. Actually, the transformation begins with the issue you now hold in your hands. Notice, that our format has changed to three columns from two. Reason: easier readability (the smaller the print and the wider the column, the higher the eye-strain quotient). Thus, we feel that our new three column format will be easier on aging eyes. Also, by running the majority of our photos now two columns wide, we are able to reproduce larger photos as many readers have been requesting. True, we may be publishing fewer photos (30 this issue compared to 46 last

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EVELYN ANKERS: *Queen of the Horrors*

By
Gregory William Mank

Even a Man who is pure in heart,
and says his prayers by night,
may become a wolf, when the wolfbane blooms,
and the Autumn moon is bright.
—Evelyn Ankers, to Lon Chaney in The Wolf Man.

Yesterday, when I saw Ygor, I felt that something had come out of the past to threaten our happiness. Please don't let it spoil our lives. Father, promise me!
— Evelyn Ankers, to Sir Cedric Hardwicke in The Ghost of Frankenstein.

You know, there was something familiar about the face of that woman - or whatever it was - I saw in my room that night...This might sound fantastic, but I think it was Paula!
— Evelyn Ankers, to Milburn Stone in Captive Wild Woman.

Oh Mark, how could you possibly SEE the Invisible Man?
— Evelyn Ankers, to Alan Curtis in The Invisible Man's Revenge.

Halloween. All Hallow's Eve... traditionally the night that bonfires burn and witches fly on broomsticks and spirits run amok, enjoying power as they do no other night of the year.

In this century's mythology, with Hollywood's Wolf Man and Mummy and Invisible Man, and Dracula, and Frankenstein's Monster the most celebrated of bogeymen, perhaps the most hallowed spot for All Hallow's Eve would be the legendary back lot of Universal City, California.

Midnight. A full moon. High in the mountains which loom over the studio, little swirls of mist appear, along with a cacophony of haunted violins and screeching black cats and screaming heroines. The ectoplasms float down, swirling about the cobbled streets of the old backlot Tyrolean village—where, 60 years ago, the villagers marched with their torches to pursue the Monster in Frankenstein. A fire destroyed much of this historic Hollywood site in the late 1980s, when a psychotic employee tried to revenge himself (herself?) on Universal by buring down the legendary European Street. Yet part of the village survived. And it is here, this Halloween night, that the ghosts of the Cinema's most beloved nightmares gather for their revels...

In a silvery glow, the ghosts take form, in the streets—the village festooned with garland wreathes, and candlelit Jack O'Lanterns leering atop poles, and bonfire tepees ready to be lit throughout the evening. There is a spectral band, and as the festivities begin, the spirit of Franz Waxman leads the orchestra in the rousing march from Bride of Frankenstein...

The spirits applaud respectfully—there has appeared the shade of Carl Laemmle, Sr., still tiny and wizened and smiling, a bit dazed by the Universal of today, the nation's third largest tourist attraction, those "Keep Off the Grass" signs which bore his signature gone for half-a-century. If the Founder makes a speech tonight, hopefully it will be more inspiring than the one he made on Universal's opening day, March 15, 1915: "I hope I didn't make a mistake coming out here." Partially in his shadow is "Junior" Laemmle, producer of the greatest horror films of all time, yet scarcely more a ghost now than he was the final 40 years of his life, when he haunted Hollywood as one of the movies' most colossal has-beens...

A warm reception greets the dour ghost of Lon Chaney, Sr., free for the night from his anonymous crypt at Forest Lawn, Glendale. Long gone is the back lot Notre Dame Catherdral, where The Man of a Thousand Faces, with his 70-lb. hump, swung from a gargoyle in 1923's The Hunchback of Notre Dame. However, still standing on the old "Phantom Stage" is the original Paris Opera House set of 1925's The Phantom of the Opera, the 5-tiers of decaying brocaded balconies now almost as ghastly as the Phantom's death's head face. Chaney leaves the back lot revelers to visit this historic old set...

The first bonfire goes up in flame. The revelers cheer. And there enters, dramatically, the sardonic ghost of "Jimmy" Whale, with swagger and cheroot, still playing the English aristocrat, and sporting the elegant suit he wore the day he drowned himself in his Pacific Palisades pool in 1957. Universal's bitter, homosexual "Ace"

director of Frankenstein, The Old Dark House, The Invisible Man, and Bride of Frankenstein had ended his life an exile, almost as pathetic as his Monster; in a wicked irony, his sad, rambling suicide note had paraphrased the Monster's classic curtain line in Whale's misanthropic masterpiece, Bride of Frankenstein—"We belong dead"...

The crowd is growing...Claude Rains...Dwight Frye...Jack P. Pierce...The band rips into the "Faro-La, Faro-Li" song from Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man...

A new cheer arises—for here is the cadaverous ghost of Colin Clive, smoking a cigarette, and garbed in his laboratory smock from Frankenstein and Bride of Frankenstein; the hypersensitive actor, remembered by Frankenstein leading lady Mae Clarke as having the face of Christ, and who was crucified by alcohol in 1937. Clive is happy to return to the site where, as the tormented Frankenstein, he passionately screamed "It's alive!", the genre's most apocalyptic line. Originally he cackled the tag, "In the name of God! Now I know what it feels like to BE God!" Censors quickly cut it; MCA Video recently managed to restore it up through "know what it..." Perhaps tonight, Clive will reprise the entire line for the celebrants...

Another bonfire lights. Joining hands around it is Elsa Lanchester, once again in her Bride of Frankenstein makeup and costume. Soon she leaves the party and hikes with friends to Universal's lake, seeking an angry, hissing swan, such as the one in London's Regents Park that was her inspiration for the vainglorious Female Monster...

Edward Van Sloan...Maria Ouspenskaya..... Henry Hull...John Carradine...

The music and crowd grow louder. There's Lionel Atwill, Horror's cat-eyed voluptuary, chuckling, smoking, and sporting the monocle, constable uniform, and black wooden arm he cocked to salute in Son of Frankenstein. He enjoys a folk dance with the spirit of Ilona Massey, just as they did at the Festival of the New Wine in Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, as revelers gossip once again of the Yuletide "orgy" Atwill allegedly hosted at his Pacific Palisades house in 1940—and which nearly destroyed his career. Oblivious, Atwill finishes his dance with Miss Massey and looks for more horror heroines to charm. There are few on "this side" yet; heroines are a deceptively hardy breed...

Basil Rathbone...Glenn Strange.....Ernest Thesiger...J. Carrol Naish...George Zucco....

There is a respectful (but restrained) welcome for the burly ghost of Lon Chaney, Jr., Universal's "Master Character Creator" of the War Years, 4-F portrayer of the Wolf Man and the Monster and Count Alucard and the Mummy. Few of the celebrants are aware of his mortal decision that willed his alcohol-abused body as an anatomical specimen to the University of Southern California Medical School. He keeps a strange distance from his Father, who has silently rejoined the party; instead, Lon Jr. makes a beeline for the punchbowl...

Tod Browning...Edgar Ulmer...Karl Freund...Louis Friedlander...Rowland V. Lee...

The festivities are nearing a climax. And now, in the middle of the square, appear the inevitable hosts of this Hallow's Eve celebration—Karloff and Lugosi. "Dear Boris," in his 1931 Monster guise, with his cigarette, sly grin, and a cup of punch, delighting the revelers with his British humor; "Poor Bela," tall and resplendent in the Dracula cape in which he was buried, smoking his cigar, enjoying the Gypsy music, emotionally wiping away a tear at the warmth of the reception.

However, there must be a Queen for the Festivities.

And the Queen of this All Hallow's Eve is, of course, Evelyn Ankers, Universal's blonde and beautiful "Queen of the Horrors;" she of the soulful scream; leading lady of The Wolf Man, The Ghost of Frankenstein, Captive Wild Woman, Son of Dracula, The Mad Ghoul, Weird Woman, The Invisible Man's Revenge, et al; her lovely face always a joy in close-up, be she registering chic fear, romantic allure, or simply my-girdle-is-killing-me discomfort; a charming actress with modern lady sophistication, yet fairy tale princess magic...

Lon Chaney, Jr., fresh from the punchbowl, asks her for a dance. She turns him down flat.

Nevertheless, as the festivities peak, the celebrants merrily request that Evelyn signal the start of the torchlight parade, to be led by Karloff and Lugosi, through the village streets, up Universal's highest hill, to light the climatic Halloween bonfire.

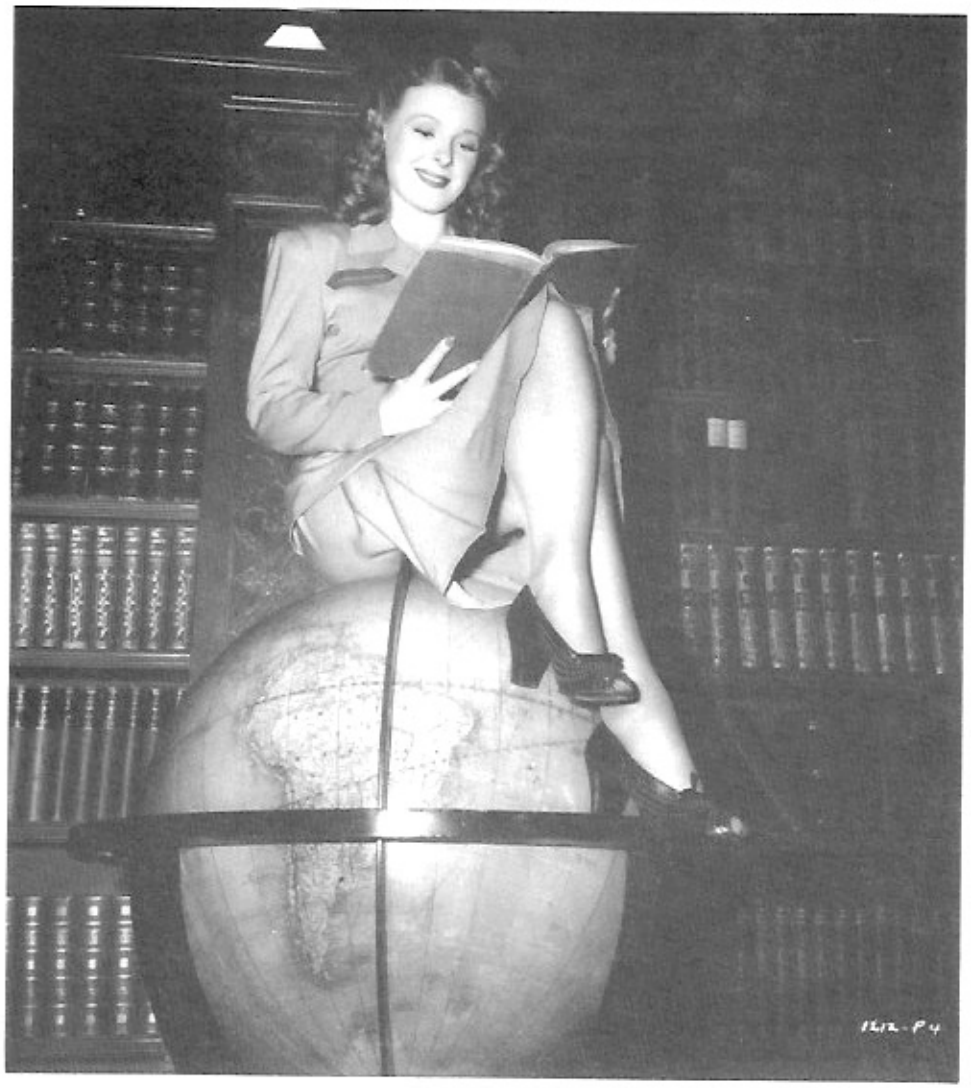
And Evelyn Ankers smiles, tosses back her blonde hair—and screams.

At Universal City in the 1940s, she was known as "The Screamer." The crews on her pictures often jokingly heralded her as "The Poor Man's Fay Wray." And to many legions of horror disciples, she eventually won the title of "Queen of the Horrors."

The blonde, beautiful, sadists' pin-up girl—Evelyn Ankers.

For devotees of Hollywood melodrama, visions of Evelyn Ankers in horrific peril abound: loping in her high heels through the twisted trees and epic fog of The Wolf Man, caterwauling in the claws of Lycanthrope Lon Chaney Jr.; wailing in the corridors of The Ghost of Frankenstein, Chaney's Monster using

Perched upon the globe--the famous talisman of Universal Pictures--Evelyn might very well symbolize the Universal of the early 1940s in this candid shot from The Ghost of Frankenstein



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her as an evening-gowned battering ram against a locked laboratory door; shrieking in her boudoir as Acquanetta's Captive Wild Woman jealously leered over her...

Sashaying chicly through the morbidities of Son of Dracula, shrieking at the mayhem of The Mad Ghoul, shuddering at The Invisible Man's Revenge...

Indeed, Evelyn's class, poise, and Royal Academy of Dramatic Art thesping sparked not only Universal's legendary Horror output. She was one of the lot's most versatile and delightful attractions: a glamorous stooge for Abbott & Costello (Hold That Ghost); a sultry "other woman" to Deanna Durbin (His Butler's Sister); both heroine (The Voice of Terror) and heavy (The Pearl of Death) to Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes; she would even oomph a burlesque number, "Just Because You Made Those Goo-Goo Eyes at Me," in Bowery to Broadway (while 6 months pregnant!).

Yet, by the mid-'40s, Evelyn Ankers, after an incredible 27 films in three-and-a-half years, had deserted the bungalow she shared at Universal with Anne Gwynne; and, by the end of the 1940s, her career was virtually over altogether. As devoted wife to actor Richard Denning and mother to their daughter Dee, she shunned show business, finally retired to Hawaii, eventually referred all fan mail to her daughter, became something of a mystery until her death from cancer in 1985.

Nevertheless, her own star—too often eclipsed in the War Years by the trumpeted publicity heaped upon her monstrous co-stars (especially poor, pathetic Chaney, Jr.)—seems to rise higher each year, especially with fans of the Horror Genre. And with this growing celebration comes the welcome news that Miss Ankers' daughter is at work on a very personal, comprehensive book on the life of her celebrated Mom.

Meanwhile, this is a tribute to an actress who, for so many of us, became the imperiled princess of our adult fairy tales, the Horror Movies: Evelyn Ankers.

"I was under contract to Paramount Pictures, and I had a bowling team—'Dick Denning's Demons.' We were having a final tournament at the Sunset Bowling Alley, there were 53 teams, and 'Dick Denning's Demons' was way up in front. Evelyn Ankers and I had the same publicity agent, and he thought, 'Gee, this is great. I'll see if I can arrange a meeting.' So he told me she was anxious to meet me, and told her I was anxious to meet her—when, in reality, neither one of us had even heard of the other!

So I'm bowling, and there's Evie Ankers, sitting in the bleachers with her mother, and all dressed up in a tight black silk dress, and a big hat, and high heel shoes—anything but a bowling costume! Finally, the publicity agent came down and said, 'Look—Evie's really getting upset up there. Here you've been anxious to meet her, and you haven't even come up and said hello.' So I said, 'You told me that she was so anxious to meet ME—so she can sit up there for a bit until I get through with this game!'

Anyway, I got through, and went up and met her, and said, 'How about joining us in bowling?'—never thinking for a MINUTE that she would do it, because she's all dressed up!

And she said, 'Oh sure. I'd love to!'

Well, she came down, in her tight black dress and big hat; she kicked off her high heels; she grabbed the ball, having never been a bowler—and she ripped her black silk dress, right up the side!

But, as fate would have it—she hit a strike.

And I thought, if this gal could do that, she's got something!"

—Richard Denning, in an interview with Gregory William Mank, June, 1990.

On Wednesday, January 8, 1941, Universal City signed a new actress to a 7-year contract.

In those days, Universal was a crazy circus, a rip-roaring carnival going full blast under the San Fernando Valley mountains. The Film Daily Yearbook clocked Universal's 1941 output at an incredible 59 feature films—along with serials, musical shorts, and Walter Lantz's Woody Woodpecker cartoons. In the center ring were Universal's top attractions: soprano sensation Deanna Durbin (who had just received her first on-screen kiss from Robert Stack in 1939's First Love); W. C. Fields (fresh from his Egbert Souse of 1940's The Bank Dick); and a pair of former burlesque comics about to win fame, fortune, and enormous Universal clout in Buck Privates: Abbott and Costello.

Also in the major spotlight were Marlene Dietrich, who had scored a magnificent comeback in Universal's 1939 Destry Rides Again, as well as Irene Dunne and Loretta Young, who visited Universal now and then on special contracts for preferred roles and reverential pampering.

And leaping back and forth from main ring "A's" and sideshow "B's" were the more servicable, less lofty contractees: leading men Richard Arlen, Buster Crabbe, Broderick Crawford, Dick Foran, Robert Cummings, Allan Jones, and the Durbin-kissing Robert Stack; starlets Jane Frazee, Nan Grey, Anne Gwynne, Irene Hervey, Constance Moore, Peggy Moran, Helen Parrish, and Maria Montez—whose beauty (as well as ambition and temperament) soon coronated her as Universal's Queen of Kitsch.

There were the "curiosities" like Baby Sandy, and the Andrews Sisters.

And, of course, there was the Chamber of Horrors. Boris Karloff, Universal's Frankenstein Monster, was gone, shaking with stage fright, about to open on Broadway in two days in Arsenic and Old Lace. However, still harmlessly relaxing in Universal bungalows were such actors as Bela Lugosi, Lionel Atwill, and George Zucco. Also, the studio was picking up its option on another horror name: the son of "The Man of a Thousand Faces," who had triumphed as the retarded Lennie in 1939's Of Mice and Men and had just had a Universal horror trial-run in Man Made Monster: Lon Chaney, Jr.

Come January 8, 1941, Evelyn Ankers, of the London Stage and Cinema, and of Broadway, joined the Universal fold. "A vehicle for her American film debut is being sought," loftily proclaimed a Universal PR release, "and will be announced soon."

Considering such a grand herald, it perhaps seemed something of a comedown that, less than 2 weeks after signing her contract,

THE WOLF MAN: Reversing the procedure as outlined in the script, here Evelyn Ankers assaults fiend Lon Chaney, Jr.

Evelyn was the featured romantic lead (opposite Richard Carlson) in Abbott and Costello's new film, Hold That Ghost. Besides the comic routines of the stars, audiences got the rubber face of Joan Davis, the music of Ted Lewis ("Is Everybody Happy?") and his Orchestra—and The Andrews Sisters. Evelyn played Norma Lind in her very first Hollywood film, and she might easily have been upstaged but for her beauty, poise—and the three wild screams she sounded in the course of the comedy's 86 minutes.

Hold That Ghost was a wild set, but Evelyn Ankers was very much her own lady. So raucous were Bud and Lou in their on-set antics that Evelyn (as she recalled) kept her back to the wall at all times.

In August of 1990, 89-year old Arthur Lubin, director of Hold That Ghost, recalled Evelyn for me as he relaxed at his Hollywood Hills house:

"In those days of the Movies, Evelyn Ankers had just what the moviegoers so much wanted to see—beauty, and gentleness. I did two pictures with her at Universal, Hold That Ghost and Eagle Squadron (9142). She was a darling girl, always on time on the set—and she always looked well-groomed. Everybody loved her."

Evelyn was all-actress—and all-lady. Hit the Road was a vehicle for the "Little Tough Guys" Huntz Hall, Billy Halop, Gabriel Dell, et al. Warner Bros. previously called them "The Dead End Kids." Monogram later called them "The East Side Kids," and then much later, "The Bowery Boys," but Evelyn always called them "Hoodlums." During shooting, she defied her character's name of Patience Ryan, lambasting the boys for ridiculing and defying the director, German refugee Joe May. And on the same picture, she escaped a romantic overture from Mr. Hall ("acne and all," she recalled) on the deserted set—by issuing a quick, firm knee to his groin.

Fiancee Beth Chase in the Baby Sandy comedy, Bachelor Daddy...innkeeper's daughter Ann McBragel in the adventure-mystery Burma Convoy...Her film roles kept a-coming!

By the time Richard Denning met Evelyn Ankers at the bowling tournament that night, "Evie" was fully established at Universal City. Only 23 years old, Miss Ankers already had an incredibly adventurous (and traumatic) life behind her. It was a life which Mr. Denning learned about as he courted the actress Universal would promote as "the unofficial globe-trotting champion of Hollywood."

"Evie grew up under so many difficulties as a girl. She learned to survive through grit and determination. She was born in Valparaiso, Chile, of English parents. She had a 10-year older brother Derek, and her Dad ran off when Evie was still a child. He was a very relaxed, charming, 'gay caballero'; he wound up in Spain, and had a lady friend over there, and then went to England and lived his whole life off some woman. I met him for the first time on a picture I did in England; he looked so young, and everything was 'Ho! Ho! ho! Wonderful!' I thought, 'Holy smoke! He's like a 40-year old guy, and that's how old I am! How can this possibly be Evie's father!' But he never accepted any responsibility for raising a family, or anything else. So something Evie never really had was a father...

So 'Mom' had to make a living, and Evie became one of those child actresses whom the mother kept pushing and pushing and pushing—Evie NEVER really liked the business. Her mother was not only excited about her career, she became dependent on her career..."
—Richard Denning

August 17, 1918 always has been the publicized date of the birth of Evelyn Ankers. The Universal publicity mill indulged itself, issuing releases about her adventurous "mining engineer" father and her mother, "the first white woman" to venture into "savage South American jungles":

"The nature of her father's work took the Ankers family far into the jungles and mountain vastnesses of South and Central America. Unruly natives, hair-breadth escapes in mountain torrents, and landslides have filled the young player's life with thrills and adventure."

There was also some true horror for the child. As Doug McClelland (who became closer to Evelyn than any other film historian) reported in his piece on Evelyn Ankers in Leonard Maltin's late-lamented Film Fan Monthly (Oct. 1968): "...whisked all over South America during childhood, Ankers had seen her father, a mining engineer, shot in the stomach by a worker he'd discharged. Another time, he had his horse shot under him by the henchman of a rubber magnate."

After Father deserted his family, Mrs. Ankers pinned her hopes on her beautiful daughter, and at age of 10, Evelyn made her dramatic debut: the title role in The Daughter of Dolores, presented on the stage in Columbia. Perhaps inspired by a "roving fortune teller, high in the Chilean Andes" (again courtesy of Universal publicity), who told little Evelyn she would "go far," Mrs. Ankers soon took off for England, with her talented daughter in tow, in hopes of attracting a major producer.

Universal made much of the fact that Evelyn ("who, by the way, pronounces it `Ee-v-elyn'," noted a PR release) attended the Latymer School in London, as well as the Golophyn School and the Tacchomo School of Music and Dramatic Art. However, as Richard Denning says, "She didn't have a great education, scholastically...," due to her Mother's exhaustive traveling and career planning. Evelyn's real desire was to become a ballet dancer; in fact, Evelyn danced on the very first "live" British television show, telecast in 1934. According to Universal, a physician switched her to acting because "she was growing so rapidly" and the physician feared "the strain of continual dancing practice might prove injurious to her."

It was 18-year old Evelyn's "arresting blonde beauty" that supposedly caught the eye of the great Alexander Korda, while he dined at the Savoy Grill one night. Korda signed her, and Evelyn Ankers' first film was Belles of St. Mary's, an MGM release of 1936, never released in the U.S. Evelyn was one of the flock of school girls—and was unimpressed by herself on the screen. "After seeing myself in my first film, Belles of St. Mary's in 1936," she told Doug McClelland, "I decided I needed a LOT more training and was accepted by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art."

The next years were very busy ones: training at the RADA, playing on the London stage with Vivien Leigh in Bats in the Belfry, and acting in such Korda films as

Evelyn as Kitty, the doomed Limehouse gal, from Sherlock Holmes and The Voice of Terror.

Rembrandt (1936, with Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester, with Evelyn as a dinner party guest). Evelyn was a socialite in Wings of the Morning (1937, starring Henry Fonda and Annabella, and was Evelyn's first color film), lady-in-waiting to Flora Robson's Elizabeth I in Fire Over England (1937, with Raymond Massey, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Leslie Banks, and Robert Newton), again a lady-in-waiting, this time to Marlene Dietrich in Knight Without Armour (1937), and a skier in Over the Moon (1938, with Merle Oberon, Robert Douglas, and Rex Harrison). Her first lead was as Dorothy in Fox-British's 1938 Murder in the Family, a "quota-quickie" which also featured Jessica Tandy, Roddy McDowall, and Glynis Johns. Between 1936 and 1938, Evelyn appeared in 12 British films. Major celebrity almost came her way when MGM considered Evelyn for the female lead in 1939's Goodbye Mr. Chipps; however, red-haired Greer Garson won the role, quickly becoming The Class Act of MGM during the War Years.

A film offer took Evelyn and Mother back to Buenos Aires in 1939; when it failed to come through, Evelyn headlined her own radio show, The Evelyn Ankers Hour—as a singer. Once again, top stardom loomed when Gabriel Pascal called Evelyn back to England for Major Barbara; however, the war scuttled production, and Deborah Kerr eventually won stardom in the role Evelyn was originally to play. Mother and Evelyn then decided the best bet was America, but both received a shock when, en route on a Holland-American liner, they were stopped by a Nazi submarine. After a tete-a-tete between the captains, the liner continued for America.

Success followed—on Broadway. On March 26, 1940, the melodrama Ladies in Retirement opened at Henry Miller's Theatre, starring Flora Robson. Evelyn had landed the role of the maid, Lucy Gilham, who, in her big moment, prophetically let out a wild, bloodcurdling scream which shook the theatre—and the audience. "Go to see it and get the hell scared out of you!" proclaimed Walter Winchell of the NY Daily Mirror. In a Broadway season which boasted such attractions as Katharine Hepburn in The Philadelphia Story, Monty Woolley in The Man Who Came to Dinner, and John Barrymore in My Dear Children, Ladies in Retirement ran 151 performances in New York, then took off for Los Angeles. (Columbia would produce a 1941 film version of Ladies in Retirement, starring Ida Lupino, with Evelyn Keyes in the Evelyn Ankers stage role of Lucy.) During the play's Los Angeles engagement, Evelyn's beauty (and scream) inspired contract overtures/offers from Universal, Warner Bros., and 20th Century-Fox. Evelyn originally accepted the Fox offer, and was promptly announced for Scotland Yard, to star George Sanders.

Sanders had other ideas. The cynical star spent most of his time at Fox sleeping, creating new vile names to call studio chief Darryl F. Zanuck, and taking suspensions; Scotland Yard was one of them. Sanders claimed the script was offensive to Scotland Yard and the entire nation of England to boot. John Loder replaced him, while Fox replaced Evelyn with contractee Nancy Kelly (who had Fox's 1939 smash Jesse James to her credit, and was considered a more alluring box office name). In the realm of Alice Faye, Linda Darnell, and Betty Grable, Evelyn was quickly adrift.

However, Universal's offer still held. The lot needed a leading lady for Abbott and Costello's Hold That Ghost, and Evelyn said goodbye to Fox and hello to Universal come January 1941.

By Christmas of that year, Evelyn had found her special "niche" at Universal—one originally confining, yet one which eventually assured her of movie immortality.

"Did Evie enjoy working with Abbott and Costello? No, they kept goosing her all the time. And that didn't go over too well—she was this almost 'stuffy' English girl, in one of her early films. Of course, they were difficult to work with—and then Evie met an equal to them in Lon Chaney, Jr.!

As for Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce on the Sherlock Holmes picture—oh yeah, she enjoyed them. They had a great sense of humor, especially Nigel Bruce, and he could identify with Evie's English background. They had a lot of fun. One time, I came on their set, I was in the Navy (before I went into submarines) and I had my tight dress-blues on. Nigel and Evie are sitting talking, and I came over, just to say hello. Nigel, seated, turned around to me and said to Evie, "Oh, my dear girl! Your husband has the most enormous..er...er..PERSONALITY that I think I've ever seen!" (I don't think I could equal that today!)

Deanna Durbin? Yes, Evie enjoyed her. She thought Deanna was a great gal...No problems. But see, Evie never really liked acting. Period. She didn't like the work, she didn't like to have to get up at 5 in the morning, and all that. So it was a real strain on her. Evie was a wonderful, wonderful gal, but she had a very strong personality, and a very definite temperament—she could take just so much."
—Richard Denning

"Biggest of the Universal horror pictures since Son of Frankenstein, the new shocker will present Chaney in the role of a monstrous 'wolf-man,' around whose inhuman activities the plot revolves..."
—Universal PR release, 1941

On December 9, 1941—one decade and 3 days after the official release of Frankenstein—Universal City hosted a special press preview of The Wolf Man. The studio was proud of its "All-Star Horror Film," produced and directed by George Waggner, scripted by Curt Siodmak, scored by Charles Previn, Frank Skinner, and Hans J. Salter, and starring Claude Rains, Warren William, Ralph Bellamy, Patric Knowles, Bela Lugosi, Maria Ouspenskaya, Evelyn Ankers, and Lon Chaney.

"Previewed at the studio for a press and professional audience," reported Motion Picture Herald, "which displayed no enthusiasm for the enterprise."

Yet, to Universal's joy, The Wolf Man became the hit of the season. The $180,000 production reaped a $1,000,000 domestic gross, gave the studio a new horror actor with the same surname as the long-deceased star of The Hunchback of Notre Dame and The Phantom of the Opera, and bequeathed the studio a horror film which, over the decades, has become a major part of Universal's awesome Monster Mythology.

Too, The Wolf Man gave the horror genre Evelyn Ankers. As Gwen Conliffe, fated to be the love of poor, doomed Lawrence Talbot, Evelyn sparked many moments of The Wolf Man:

*There is her enchanting introduction: Chaney, adjusting the giant telescope in his father's observatory, aiming it into the backlot Tyrolean town (pointed out for years on the Universal Tour as "used in The Wolf Man"), and spying Evelyn, through the window of her second story bedroom, trying on earrings and coyly posing before her mirror (more than one horror fan has wished that Chaney had adjusted his telescope about 3 minutes earlier...).

*There is the flirtatious first meeting of Chaney and Evelyn in Gwen's father's antique shop, as she shows him the silver wolf's head cane...Evelyn's distinction of being the first player to recite the infamous "Even a man who is pure in heart..." ditty (believed for years to have been true to German folklore, but actually concocted by Curt Siodmak, who laughs, "It's amazing how fertile one's imagination becomes when a check is attached to the job!")...the fog-shrouded visit to the camp of Bela the Gypsy (Lugosi), with Larry and Jenny Williams (Fay Helm), and its aftermath—as Larry is bitten by the wolf which has torn out Jenny's throat...The Gypsy carnival, where Chaney gives Evelyn the pentagram, and she runs off alone as a terrified Gypsy warns Chaney, "There's a werewolf in camp!"...

*And of course, there's the classic climax, Chaney's Wolf Man baying in the foggy

A personal photo of Evelyn Ankers and husband Richard Denning from the Doug McClelland collection, taken in Hawaii in 1970.

forest, the musical score blasting away; Evelyn, bravely racing past the gnarled, horrific trees, her blonde hair bouncing on her shoulders, trying to find her Larry, Maria Ouspenskaya's marvelous old Maleva warning her, "Come with me or he will find YOU!"; the Wolf Man attacking Evelyn, bestially fondling her, snarling in her face as she screams wildly, hysterically, magnificently...and finally, Evelyn, in the arms of her fiance Knowles, looking past the anguished face of Rains' John Talbot, who has killed his own son with the silver-headed cane, seeing the transformed face of the Wolf Man, and gasping the film's curtain line—"Larry..."

As The Wolf Man filmed October 27 to November 25, 1941, Evelyn was having a fatalistic fright in real life: her association with Lon Chaney, Jr.

Certainly Chaney, Jr. is one of the most beloved horror legends of the screen, and his Wolf Man has a strange, tragic magic all its own. However, research on the personal life of Universal's "New Master Character Creator" has raised the curtain on a violently disturbed man, almost as sadly grotesque as some of his screen performances. Traumatized by his Father who brutally beat him as a child (and, until his death in 1930, kept his son from becoming an actor), "sexually confused" (so says Curt Siodmak), an alcoholic whose drunken outbursts on the set could be truly dangerous, the 6', 220-lb. Chaney, with a wart beside his nose and a hip flask in his pocket, would be Evelyn's leading man in 6 pictures (as well as guesting with her in 1944's Follow the Boys).

The meeting was hardly auspicious.

Evelyn thought very highly of movie historian Doug McClelland, author of such recently acclaimed filmbooks as Blackface to Blacklist, Hollywood Talks Turkey, Eleanor Parker, and many others. She wrote the foreword ("The B and I") for his 1978 book, The Golden Age of "B" Movies—and recorded her first meeting with the redoubtable Chaney on The Wolf Man, and his first words to her.

"So you're the gal who swiped my dressing room," growled Chaney. "You took it away from Broderick Crawford and me—I think that was a hell of a thing to do!"

Evelyn, concerned, asked the front office about the "plush, new dressing room" just awarded her, which she shared with Anne Gwynne—and learned why she had inherited it:

"Someone told me that every Friday or Saturday night, Lon and Brod Crawford would take bottles into their dressing room, get loaded, and then somehow manage to hang the furniture from the ceiling and brawl...the cleaning crew was treated to a sight resembling a World War II battlefield."

The boisterous Chaney, arriving onstage in full Wolf Man regalia (courtesy, of course, of makeup genius Jack P. Pierce), loved creeping up behind Evelyn, tapping her on the shoulder, and—when she turned around—bare fangs and grab her. ("He had to hold me, or I would have ended up in the rafters!")

Yet Chaney wasn't the only trial of The Wolf Man. The fog machine (cited by some as one of the true stars of the picture) was so strong in its wafting chemicals that Evelyn, while filming the climax in the forest, passed out cold on the "forest" floor—and nobody noticed! "It would have been a short career," Evelyn wrote, "if they hadn't tripped over me at last."

However, Evelyn's real menace on The Wolf Man was not Chaney, nor the fog machine. It was a 600-lb. bear, held on a chain by a gypsy (Kurt Katch) in the carnival episode, originally featured in the uncut print fighting a human-form Larry Talbot. As Evelyn wrote in McClelland's The Golden Age of "B" Movies:

"The Bear...decided that he wanted to know me better. I was unaware of what was happening behind me. The next thing I knew Lon took off, as did everybody else. I turned, wondering what the commotion was all about and where my leading man had gone, and saw the bear coming after me!

I never ran so fast in all my life. With the bear coming close behind me, I shot up a ladder into the rafters, where an electrician grabbed my hand and pulled me on top his platform. He then blinded the bear with a hot floodlight. The trainer finally caught up with the animal, retrieved his chain, reprimanded him, and gradually got him back down onto the stage. After I scrambled down myself (it was much harder going down, believe me), they told me I had FLOWN up!"

(Universal, of course, had its revenge on the ebullient bear, cutting him entirely from the release print of The Wolf Man.)

All in all, The Wolf Man was a melodrama offscreen for Evelyn too. "When it was over," she wrote, "I was relieved and happy that the gray hairs didn't show among the blonde."

"Evelyn Ankers is a lovely, intelligent heroine," noted The Hollywood Reporter in reviewing The Wolf Man. Yet no one fully realized then just how dynamically Evelyn was filling out the cycle of Universal horror heroines. Of course, the most legendary ladies of Universal's nightmares had been horrific themselves, such as Elsa Lanchester's marvelous, hissing Female Monster of Bride of Frankenstein and Gloria Holden's dark harbinger of celluloid Lesbiana in Dracula's Daughter. Yet the "leading ladies" had been a fascinating lot, a striking, sometimes kinky parade of beauties and talents, often almost as eccentric as the Horror Shows themselves...

Mary Philbin, in 1925's The Phantom of the Opera, had been all hyperactive frills and flutters as Chaney's Christine. Blonde Helen Chandler's Mina, whose neck so tantalized Lugosi's Dracula, was also of the wilting flower school, complementing the drawing room antiques and style of Tod Browning's peculiar direction. Mae Clarke, Elizabeth of the Karloff Frankenstein (and a favorite of director James Whale, who had just starred her in Waterloo Bridge), provided class and intelligence—thereby spotlighting the romance of Colin Clive, whose frenzy and torment dominated his performance as the Monster maker; she, too, was properly blonde. Brunette Sidney Fox, of Murders in the Rue Morgue, was a throwback to Mary Philbin, while Gloria Stuart, Whale's leading lady for The Old Dark House and The Invisible Man, was a porcelain blonde beauty, classy, fragile, brittle—and with a certain sophisticated, soigne sexuality. Zita Johann, Anck-es-en-Amon to Karloff's The Mummy, was a

Evelyn Ankers prepares to go before the camera for Universal's The Frozen Ghost, with the assistance of her makeup man. This was her final film before she retired to have a baby.

powerhouse Broadway actress, poetically perfect for that romance of reincarnation, almost too sparklingly dramatic for Hollywood...

Jacqueline Wells, Joan of the Karloff & Bela Lugosi The Black Cat, played the heroine (as directed by Edgar Ulmer) with a deadly coy sexuality—one believably appetizing to the mad, Satan-worshiping, virgin-sacrificing sex fiend so wolfishly leered by "Dear Boris."

The superb Valerie Hobson, dressed up by James Whale in a $125 wig and satin bridal gown (under which he mandated she wear no underwear), is a marvelously operatic Elizabeth in Bride of Frankenstein, an hysterical Christmas angel, in perfect pitch with that mad morality tale; she also showcased her scream in Werewolf of London. Irene Ware, of Boris and Bela's The Raven, has a vestige of "The Arts" about her, being a Depression interpretive dancer, yet still horror heroine glamourpuss. And the beautiful Frances Drake, in her Grecian gowns in the Karloff & Bela Lugosi The Invisible Ray, was a wonderful exotic—looking like a saintly martyr in a Raphael Renaissance painting, yet with giant hazel eyes, that seemed to be slyly keeping some sexy secret...

Marguerite Churchill, of Dracula's Daughter, was almost a comic relief character, while Josephine Hutchinson, the red-haired Elsa of Son of Frankenstein, was a model of hauteur until her wild, climactic screams.

And then came Evelyn Ankers. She took the Universal heroine into a new, real realm—while retaining a touch of the fairy tale, a slice of the magic. Tall, elegant, she was too sophisticated for the Grimm Bros. style of the '30s classics, with none of the eccentricities of some of her predecessors. Yet she was beautiful, fragile, stunning in her Vera West wardrobes, her '40's glamour style (did ANY actress ever wear hats so charmingly?) and low-key performances perfectly suited to the new, rapid pace of Universal's '40's horrors. Of course, in one wonderful aspect, Evelyn was far more flamboyant than her predecessors: none of the Universal ladies of the celebrated '30s could match Evelyn's lush, classic, full-throated scream.

A few historians have expressed regret that Evelyn wasn't around to grace the Horror of the epic 1930s. Truly, however, it was the 1940s which best suited her—and certainly, which most needed her. It was once said that Fred Astaire gave Ginger Rogers class, while she gave him sex appeal; Evelyn gave sparks of both to Lon Chaney, (especially in The Wolf Man), immeasurably aiding an actor whose great forte was a bovine sincerity.

And after all—can one imagine arch, cherrot-smoking "Jimmy" Whale, directing headstrong, no-nonsense Evelyn as he did Valerie Hobson in Bride of Frankenstein—and ordering her to wear no underwear under her costume?

"We eloped to Las Vegas—September 6, 1942. We celebrated monthly anniversaries. Gosh, until we were married about 25 years, we still exchanged monthly anniversary cards...

A haunting, mesmerizing shot of horror villain Lon Chaney, Jr. and Evelyn Ankers, a publicity pose from The Frozen Ghost.

Anyway, we were married over Labor Day weekend, and of course we didn't get any sleep. The next morning, I was back on the set of a picture I was doing at Fox with George Sanders—Quiet Please, Murder. I had a scene with the leading lady, Lynne Roberts, where she was supposed to run away from Sanders, and faint: I had to pick her up, pull my gun out of the holster, shoot the door open so we could escape. Of course, I was very tired! Well after the first take, the director (John Larkin) said, 'Aw, Dick, you did that like an old man! Now come on, let's do it again!' Well, we kept on doing it—5 takes, picking up this gal (who happened to have a pretty rugged build)! And finally I said, 'Look! This is it! I cannot pick this gal up again!' And the director laughed, 'That's OK! The first take was perfect! We just wanted to see if you could do it!'

Less than 3 weeks after we were married, I enlisted in the Navy, eventually winding up in submarines for three years. And then Evie had to work to support her mother and me, because my service salary wasn't commensurate with what I was getting in the picture business..."

—Richard Denning

Evelyn Ankers' first Universal release of 1942 found her flanked by both her dressing room predecessors, Chaney and Brod Crawford, in North to the Klondike, a 58-minute saga of gold in Alaska ("a large dose of surprisingly dull hokum," reported the NY Times). Evelyn was pioneer girl Mary Sloan.

Even before The Wolf Man premiered, Evelyn was at work on The Ghost of Frankenstein, which began shooting at Universal just days after Pearl Harbor, through the 1941 Christmas and 1942 New Year holidays—and just after Richard Denning had discussed marriage with her. Evelyn played Elsa Frankenstein, daughter of Ludwig (Sir Cedric Hardwicke); her place in Universal's Frankenstein genealogy would have made her granddaughter to Colin Clive and Mae Clarke/Valerie Hobson, niece to Basil Rathbone and Josephine Hutchinson, cousin to Donnie Dunagan. She was at her most beautiful in this fourth of the studio's Monster sagas, which features one of Evelyn's most memorable vignettes: sitting in Ludwig's study on a stormy night, studying Henry Frankenstein's records of Life and Death, she sees a monstrous shadow on the wall, turns to see Chaney's Monster and Lugosi's Ygor spying at the rain-slashed window—and screams.

Chaney, as the Monster, was no more charming to work with than before. By now he was lamenting that lugging the statuesque Evelyn about in monstrous poses was too strenuous, and ungentlemanly demanded the studio create a special strap to tie her to him, reducing his strain in lifting her. Add this to his constant whining about the makeup, and one can understand why Jack P. Pierce (according to Chaney) used to stick his makeup pencil in Chaney's eye and mouth.

Released Friday, March 13, 1942, The Ghost of Frankenstein boasted a splendid cast: Hardwicke, Lugosi, Ralph Bellamy, Lionel Atwill, even Universal's Frankenstein lucky charm Dwight Frye in a bit role as a villager. Evelyn did a promotional tour for The Ghost, and later recalled, with embarrassment, discussing Hollywood and life with "a charming, cultivated man, quiet-mannered, and a little shy." Only afterwards did Evelyn learn she had been talking with Bela Lugosi—who was so brilliant as bearded, broken-necked old Ygor that Evelyn hadn't even recognized him! (Ilona Massey would inherit Evelyn's role of Elsa in 1943's Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.)

Life went on at Universal: publicity interviews..."cheesecake" photos...and, of course, one movie assignment after another, with barely time to shop for new hats, or escape to the Racquet Club in Palm Springs...Evelyn as Nancy Mitchell, Air

Transport Auxiliary gal, in support of Robert Stack and Universal's highly-touted Diana Barrymore in Eagle Squadron...as Muriel, estranged wife to Ralph Bellamy's dual role in The Great Impersonation (a remake of the 1935 film, sans horror elements and sadly missing Dwight Frye's "Monster of the Black Bog")...

Evelyn's best role of 1942 was as Kitty, the gallant Limehouse gal of Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror. It was a dramatic showcase for Evelyn, festooned with a Cockney accent, a stirring patriotic speech to the bar denizens, and a great death scene at the treacherous hands of "Nazi" Thomas Gomez (shot on the old Dracula set). She had great fun working with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, the latter flirting with her outrageously at every opportunity.

It was in the course of 1942 that Evelyn received the only loan-out of her Universal sojourn, and it hardly was auspicious. MGM borrowed her for a 7th-billed performance as Celia Wellsby, daughter of card-cheat Henry Tranvers in Pierre of the Plains, a north woods actioner starring John Carroll and Ruth Hussey.

Also in 1942—on Sunday, September 6, in Las Vegas, to be exact—Evelyn became Mrs. Richard Denning. Her blonde, athletic husband, born Louis Albert Denninger in Poughkeepsie, New York, had signed with Paramount in 1936, playing small parts in such DeMille epics as The Buccaneer (1938), Union Pacific (1939), and North West Mounted Police (1940), supporting Betty Grable in Million Dollar Legs (1939), scoring on loanout to Columbia in Adam Had Four Sons (1941), and winning true stardom as Dorothy Lamour's wronged love in the Paramount's Technicolor Beyond the Blue Horizon (1942). "The fan mail was coming in," chuckles Denning today, "and everything was hotter than a pistol!" The war changed all that as Denning entered the Navy ("under my own name, so that the guys wouldn't be concerned about having a movie actor in their midst"). Evelyn now faced the responsibility of not only absorbing the financial shock of Denning's lost Paramount pay, but—as ever—the full support of her Mother. "Her mother didn't want Evie to get married," says Denning, "because, to put it bluntly, she thought this might be the end of her meal ticket."

1943. Eight Universal feature credits for Evelyn Ankers. Keep 'Em Slugging was 60 more minutes of Little Tough Guys; Evelyn was Sheila, big sister to Bobby Jordan. All By Myself was one of Evelyn's favorites, a slick comedy in which Evelyn, as Jean Wells, blackmails Patric Knowles into posing as her fiance; Rosemary Lane toplined the billing, and Felix Feist directed. Evelyn later picked Feist as her favorite director: he had read-throughs of the script before shooting, gave plenty of rehearsal time, and developed a rapport between the players.

In June of 1943, Universal released the infamous Captive Wild Woman, first of the Paula the Ape Woman sagas. John Carradine leered his first horror role as Dr. Sigmund Walters, transforming a gorilla into Acquanetta—who reverts to ape when sexually jealous. In this most lurid of Universal melodramas, Evelyn was star-billed as Beth Colman, girlfriend of circus lion-tamer Milburn Stone (cast reportedly, because he resembled famed Clyde Beatty in the cat-taming scenes generously lifted from Universal's 1933 The Big Cage).

Evelyn poses with Lou Costello between scenes of Hold That Ghost.

Captive Wild Woman is a wild 60-minutes, packed with guilty pleasures for this writer: Evelyn (who never looked lovelier in gorgeous hat and hip-hugging suit), archly flirting with Stone as soon as he's back from the jungle; the rococo Carradine, his slouch hat rakishly cocked, parading about the circus grounds, showing off his left profile like a mad Shakespearean; the unintentionally funny scene of the diminutive Stone, in a moment of triumph, picking up and twirling his considerably taller leading lady; and the classic horror vignette with a kinky twist: Evelyn, tossing in her bed at night, awakens to find in her boudoir, not a male monster—but a female beast! Most outrageous (and reprehensible) of course, is Acquanetta's transformation from white girl to hairy ape—the mid-point finding her black. John T. McManus, in his PM Newspaper review, went so far as to label Captive Wild Woman (and its 1944 sequel, Jungle Woman) as Nazi propaganda:

"In Mein Kampf Hitler calls the Negro a "half-born ape." Jungle Woman illustrates the point, changing a Hollywood glamour girl into an ape and vice versa with the Negro stage inserted right where Hitler says... Captive Wild Woman... was challenged at the time of its production for its Nazi ideas, but Universal made it anyway. Apparently it is to be an annual outrage until somebody passes a law against propounding Nazi race theories in America."

One wonders how all this hit the film's director, Edward Dmytryk—who, before becoming a major talent in the 1950s, crashed upon the Hollywood blacklist because of his liberal views!

Still, Captive Wild Woman is one of my

favorite Evelyn Ankers shows—primarily for the climax. Carradine traps Evelyn (who's sporting a lovely bonnet and Vera West wardrobe) in his laboratory, smirking about using her glands as Cheela the Ape (Ray "Crash" Corrigan in his ape suit) freaks out in her (his) cage. In closeup, a sly, wicked little hint of a smile flickers on Evelyn's face, and she unleashes the rampaging gorilla on Carradine—thereby avenging what he's done to poor Acquanetta's sexual promise.

Evelyn supported Deanna Durbin in Hers to Hold, as Flo Simpson; set in an aircraft plant, it co-starred Joseph Cotten and featured Deanna singing the "Seguidilla" aria from Carmen. You're a Lucky Fellow, Mr. Smith was a 63-minute musical comedy, with Evelyn's Lynn having to marry by midnight to inherit a fortune; Allan Jones was her singing leading man.

Then, in November, 1943, Universal released Son of Dracula, directed with morbid elan by Robert Siodmak (brother of Curt, who worked on the script until Robert fired him and brought in Eric Taylor). This time, the studio's lovely blonde Louise Allbritton (in a black wig) had the top femme spot as southern belle Katherine Caldwell, two-timing Chaney's pudgy Count "Alucard" to gain immortality for her and her lover (Robert Paige). Evelyn had a light assignment as her sister, Claire, who shares none of Katherine's evil fascinations; she doesn't even scream in the picture. Nor did Son of Dracula give Evelyn screen time with her old-vis-a-vis Chaney, who performed one of his more famous atrocities on the set (i.e., creeping up behind Robert Siodmak and smashing a vase over his bald head).

It was about this time that Evelyn, who so long suffered the Chaney indelicacies, got a bit of revenge on him—through her husband. Universal hosted a dinner to show off its Grand Guignol attractions, and Seaman Denning, who had yet to ship out on submarines, joined his wife there. As fate decreed, Evelyn, Richard, and Chaney all found themselves at the same table. Denning remembers the meal very well:

"Well, I was home, on leave from the Navy, and I had my beautiful dress blues on, which I never wore except on very special occasions! At this point, I was still with Naval Officer Procurement in downtown Los Angeles. So Chaney made some crack (as Denning performs an excellent imitation of a slurred-voice, in-his-cups Chaney):

'Of course, you're wearing the uniform, which looks BEAUTIFUL—but you're not at sea, or doing anything to win the war!'

I said, 'Well, I wouldn't say that. I do what my superior officers assign me to do, and that is, right now, recruiting WAVES so that men can be released to go to sea. And I figure that's better than just not being in the service, and making a good living as an actor, and letting your career be furthered while those of us who have to go into the service, or chose to go into the service, allow you guys to go on in pictures.'

So Chaney gave me a dirty look and said, 'Oh well, that's not a very nice attitude to have. I CAN'T make the service.' And I said, 'Well that's your problem, not mine.' And the thing kept escalating...

Finally Chaney said, 'Aw, drop dead'—and threw some of his food on my nice, new, tailor-made uniform! And that flipped me off. We were having dessert, ice cream, and I picked up my ice cream and I just splattered it right in his face—just shoved it in his face! Of course, that did it! He got up, and I got up, and we were going to really go for it! And Evie screamed, and they calmed us down. And I never saw him again!"

Evelyn's final shocker of 1943 was The Mad Ghoul, which surrounded her with George Zucco (superb as the mad doctor who lusts after her), David Bruce (in the withered, heart-seeking title spot), and Turhan Bey (as her fiance). The climax found Evelyn on the old "Phantom Stage," lip-synching to a Lillian Cornell record (Universal had betrayed its promise that Evelyn could perform her own singing, even after she had rehearsed for weeks), but naturally performing her own scream as Bruce's Ghoul staggered out of the wings. In her Introduction to The Golden Age of "B" Movies, Evelyn expressed what a "pleasure" it was to work on The Mad Ghoul with Zucco, Bruce, and Milburn Stone (her lion-taming boyfriend in Captive Wild Woman, here playing a detective): "All three were great troupers and, best of all, they were gentlemen, quite a unique characteristic in Hollywood in those days."

On September 20, 1943, Universal City released this PR release:

"With three years of intensive training behind her, Evelyn Ankers, blonde Universal actress, is now stepping into the 'big time.' During the past year, studio executives have handed Evelyn roles of steadily increasing importance, among them the part of the 'other woman' in Deanna Durbin's His Butler's Sister...

In addition to acting and dancing, Miss Ankers has a fine soprano voice, plays the piano, accordion and banjo. She rides exceptionally well, is a fine tennis player, skis, bowls, skates, and fences. Her pet indoor hobby is collecting souvenirs, her favorite being a charm bracelet which she started with a 50-year old gold hunchback given to her by her grandmother."

However, Universal City would not make good on its promise to promote Evelyn into the "big time." Before 1944 was over, Evelyn Ankers would have left the Universal lot forever.

Evelyn Ankers' final year at Universal was, perhaps, her most versatile; still, it was also perhaps her most frustrating, and one that ultimately embittered her against Hollywood.

Evelyn's first release was Ladies Courageous, Walter Wagner's salute to the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, "officially" sanctioned by the U.S. Army Air Force. Loretta Young, Geraldine Fitzgerald, and Diana Barrymore all had the sparky roles; Evelyn was Wilhelmina Van Kronk, a Teutonic WAF. The role was of little worth, but the film was pivotal in Evelyn's career; MGM had wanted her for the plum part of slatternly maid Nancy, in support to Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, in Gaslight, based on Patrick Hamilton's hit play Angel Street. Universal declined to "loan out" Evelyn, forcing her into Ladies Courageous, so MGM allowed a newcomer named Angela Lansbury to play the role—and win an Oscar nomination.

Then came Weird Woman, best of Universal's Inner Sanctums, with Evelyn in one of her flashiest roles: Ilona Carr, Other-Woman-From-Hell, out to destroy the superstitious bride (Anne Gwynne) of her old flame (Lon Chaney, hilariously miscast as a brilliant college professor/author). Based on Fritz Leiber's Conjure Wife, directed by Reginald Le Borg, Weird Woman saw Evelyn throwing herself at the married Chaney, dispatching a lovesick co-ed (Lois Collier) to create a scandal with him, sending off the co-ed's madly jealous boyfriend (Phil Brown) to attack Chaney (the boyfriend gets shot instead), driving poor old Ralph Morgan to suicide, and attempting to drive Gwynne stark, raving mad with voodoo chant phone calls. But the tables are turned, and the wicked Evelyn goes hysterical, wakes up screaming, jumps out a bedroom window in her high heels and runs across the top of an arbor, falls—and hangs herself on a vine.

Apparently, hysterics was the word for Weird Woman, on screen and off. Elizabeth Russell, the infamous "Cat Woman" of RKO's Cat People (and a guest at FANEX 4), was a heavy in Weird Woman (the NY World-Telegram reporting that she "strolls in and out of the picture acting as though any minute she was going to bite someone"). Miss Russell told me:

"As for Evelyn Ankers, she was beautiful and (I think) the real star of the film, and we were friendly and got along. What I best remember about Weird Woman is the hysterics!

We were on overtime, at the end of the picture: it was about 12 o'clock at night—and we couldn't stop laughing! The whole place! Lon Chaney would say a line, and we would have to turn our backs and laugh. I think we had to shoot the scene about 25 times!"

Follow The Boys found Evelyn (along with most of Universal's contract players, including Chaney) as "The Hollywood Victory Committee"; meanwhile, offscreen, Evelyn was busy at the Hollywood Canteen and the USO. Pardon My Rhythm was a Gloria Jean comedy, directed by Felix Feist, with Evelyn as Patric Knowles' jealous fiancee; the NY Times noted it in Evelyn's obituary as her favorite film.

It was back to horror in The Invisible Man's Revenge, starring Jon Hall; Evelyn was Julie, daughter of the English couple (Gale Sondergaard and Lester Matthews) whom Hall believed had cheated him. The real stars of this one were the John P. Fulton Special Effects, John Carradine as mad Dr. Drury of Thrustlewood, and his invisible dog, Brutus, (revealed by Tom Weaver, Mike Brunas, and John Brunas in their new book Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films, 1931-1946, to be Grey Shadow, great grandson of that stalwart silent film dog, Strongheart). By this time, Evelyn's weekly Universal salary had hit $700 (Chaney was earning $2000 weekly).

The infamous Jungle Woman followed—sequel to Captive Wild Woman, and the popular choice as Universal's all-time worst horror film. Acquanetta spoke lines (enough said), J. Carrol Naish got bogged in the mess and actually gave a rank performance, director Reginald Le Borg did what he could, and PM slammed this film as "...an out-and-out steal on unsuspecting moviegoers, being mainly old footage...from Captive Wild Woman with a few new inserts added." Aside from the finale scene in a morgue, with the cast huddled around Paula's hirsute cadaver, Evelyn (reprising her role of Beth) sat through this 60-minute opus in an interrogation room, in a perfectly lovely sombrero bonnet, her legs crossed, understandably looking as if she wished she could escape the set and her girdle and go splash in a pool. (By the time Universal produced 1945's The Jungle Captive, 3rd in the Paula the Ape Woman trilogy, the Universal days were over for Evelyn, as well as for Acquanetta, who was replaced by Vicky Lane.)

Much more felicitous was The Pearl of Death, a tip-top Sherlock Holmes thriller, with one of Evelyn's most delicious performances: villainess Naomi Drake, mistress of disguise (a Cockney dishwasher, a poor little match girl, and a bespectacled clerk), and uneasy heartthrob of the Creeper (Rondo Hatton). Widely applauded as one of the very best of the Rathbone-Bruce series, it was a showcase for Evelyn, as she wickedly sashayed through the melodrama, out to snare the Borgia Pearl.

All the while, Universal gave no rest to Evelyn. At one point, the actress found herself named "Rodeo Queen" of a western cattleman's association, and the studio dispatched her to a stock yard of sheep and calves to sit atop a boxcar—and pose in a cowgirl suit!

Meanwhile, Evelyn was keeping a secret from the Universal hierarchy: she was pregnant. Rightfully suspecting they would drop her contract if they knew the truth, Evelyn blamed her growing weight on "female problems"—only to find herself cast as Bonnie Latour, singing "Just Because You Made Those Goo-Goo Eyes at Me" in Bowery to Broadway, starring Susanna Foster. In the midst of Evelyn's 1890s striptease burlesque bumps, the baby kicked—and the "stripper" gasped.

There would be one more Universal Horror show before the studio learned the truth, and, indeed, terminated the contract: The Frozen Ghost, an awful Inner Sanctum potboiler with Evelyn as girlfriend of Chaney's hypnotist, "Gregor the Great." The movie's main attraction is noting how Vera West helped Evelyn conceal her delicate condition. Shot early in the Summer of 1944, the 12-day production would not be released until the Summer of 1945—and prove a decidedly non-glorious Universal sawn song for Evelyn Ankers.

On October 23, 1944, Diana Dee Denning was born. No longer in the Universal fold, Evelyn had to support her baby daughter, her Mother, and her overseas husband. The ensuing years would be tough ones: Evelyn visited Republic to star in Fatal Witness (1945); cavorted at PRC in the title role of Queen of Burlesque (1946); returned to Republic to co-star with Albert Dekker in The French Key (1946), as a nightclub chanteuse.

Meanwhile, Richard Denning returned home from the war—and saw his daughter for the very first time. "I picked her up, I couldn't wait, I was so thrilled," says Denning—"and she backed off and whapped me one on the face. After all, she didn't know who I was; I could have been anybody!" Both Richard and Evelyn managed to land parts in 20th Century-Fox's juvenile-targeted Black Beauty, shot late in 1945, and released in the Summer of 1946; in the beloved horse story, Evelyn lost her real-life husband to Mona Freeman. (On the same picture, a fire scene flamed out of control, singing Richard's hair and blistering his ears).

However, all the heat that had been sparked back in 1942 via Denning's Beyond the Blue Horizon had extinguished during the War Years. The Denning family moved into a house trailer in Paradise Cove. Richard worked as a lobster fisherman.

In August of 1946, weeks after Black Beauty's release, Evelyn became a U.S. citizen. Denning and Anne Gwynne accompanied her to the "swearing-in" ceremony.

Soon Denning's career picked up; he played in such features as Paramount's Seven Were Saved (1947), and Film Classics' "Cinecolor" Unknown Island (1948), in which the leading man discovered dinosaurs (actually "animated" by men sporting prehistoric suits). Denning also replaced Lee Bowman opposite Lucille Ball on CBS radio's My Favorite Husband (which had premiered July 5, 1948). Evelyn kept working too, safeguarding the family's security with paychecks for such fare as Republic's Spoilers of the North, a saga of salmon fishing, starring Paul Kelly.

However, as a concerned wife and mother, Evelyn's patience with Hollywood was wearing very thin. It would take Sam Katzman, the infamous low-budget producer of Lugosi's Monogram horrors, to detonate the explosion which ultimately lowered the curtain forever on Evelyn Ankers' career.

Evelyn Ankers charms two "Gypsy" extras on the set of The Wolf Man.

Evelyn Ankers doing publicity for her latest horror entry: The Mad Ghoul. Here she poses with monster star David Bruce and director James P. Hogan.

"Evie was doing a picture—The Last of the Redmen, for Sam Katzman and Columbia, with Jon Hall. They were up in the mountains on location, and they were hot and dusty and thirsty and tired and everything that goes on with location work. And Sam Katzman was known for his 'economical' productions!

Anyway, Evie got to the end of her tether, which was not unusual for Evie. They kept looking around for Sam Katzman and his son Lenny (or perhaps he was Sam's nephew), who was not the 'big' producer, and they couldn't be found. The word came, 'They had to go down the hill—business...' So Evie's sitting there waiting, and Sam and Lenny come up—and they're eating ice cream sundaes! And Evie's hungry, and it's before lunch...she says, 'I'm sure the rest of us would like some of that.' And Lenny said, 'Well, lunch pretty soon.' And that set Evie off. She really let it all hang out. She called them some very unfavorable names, and it was a real stand-off!

Well, I'm sure what happened was, whenever anybody referred to Sam or Lenny about Evie's performance and attitude on that picture, it was totally negative. And that didn't really bother her one little bit, because she already had had it in the business. But by this time, my career was getting started again, so Evie thought, 'Oh well—who needs it!'"

—Richard Denning

So, with the color 1947 production of The Last of the Redmen, Evelyn Ankers won a special honor in film history—the first actress documented as to telling off "Jungle Sam" Katzman. One can only wish that Bela Lugosi, whose screen reputation suffered so many indignities in Katzman's Monogram horrors, had done the same!

Whatever the blackballing power of Sam Katzman, Evelyn was soon oblivious to it. She finished off 1947 with a showy role in Columbia's The Lone Wolf in London as a London musical comedy star/thief/murderess. Her sole 1948 release was Screen Guild's Flight to Nowhere, with Evelyn as fiancee of Alan Curtis (her romantic interest in The Invisible Man's Revenge). For Eagle-Lion, Evelyn was a nightclub operator in 1949's Parole, Inc., flanked by Michael O'Shea and a soon-to-be-bald Turhan Bey.

Then came one of her best roles: Gloria James, the English aviatrix ("nicely played by Evelyn Ankers," noted the NY Times), seeking a hidden valley where, for 20 years, she had imbided from a magical fountain of youth in RKO's 1949 Tarzan's Magic Fountain. Lex Barker was the ape man, Brenda Joyce was Jane, and Albert Dekker and Charles Drake played villains out to snare Evelyn's elixir. Blonde Evelyn went "dark brown" in this melodrama, to heighten the effectiveness when her Gloria went Lost Horizon and became a gray-haired old hag.

The grand feature finale: Columbia's 1950 The Texan Meets Calamity Jane, with Evelyn as the latter—a sadly ignominious ending to a sometimes impressive Feature Film career.

Evelyn was fed up with Hollywood; what she most dearly wanted was to be a good wife and mother. Fortunately, Richard Denning's career allowed Evelyn to stick to her guns. He co-starred with Barbara Britton as TV's crime-solving Mr. and Mrs. North (CBS, 1952-1953; NBC, 1954), with Evelyn guesting on the show a couple times; worked throughout the 1950s in such films as Universal-International's Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954), Allied Artists' Target Earth (1954), 20th Century-Fox's The Magnificent Matador (1955), Columbia's Creature with the Atom Brain (1955, written by Curt Siodmak, who had scripted The Wolf Man), AIP's Day the World Ended (directed by Roger Corman 1956), 20th Century-Fox's "De Luxe Color and Cinema-Scope" An Affair to Remember (with Cary Grant and Deborah Kerr, 1957), and Warner Bros. The Black Scorpion (1957); took Evelyn and daughter Dee with him to England as he starred as television's The Flying Doctor (syndicated, 1959).

Evelyn, meanwhile, had done a bit of television throughout the 1950s: "Sam and the Whale," with Cecil Kellaway, on Cavalcade of American (ABC, 9/29/53); General Electric Theatre (CBS, 1953); Screen Director's Playhouse (NBC, 1955); 20th Century-Fox Hour (CBS, 1956); and, her reported last, Cheyenne (ABC, 1/28/58). Meanwhile, her greatest and most demanding fan, her Mother, had died in Hollywood in 1954.

The Dennings were faithful members of the Beverly Hills Lutheran Church, and after the England adventure on The Flying Doctor, Evelyn performed her last acting, in a Lutheran-sponsored featurette: No Greater Love (1960), with the former "Queen of Horrors" as a converted nurse. Denning's steady employment on TV (as Michael Shayne, Private Detective [NBC, 1960], the "Karen" segment on Ninety Bristol Court [NBC, 10/64-1/65], and its spin-off, Karen [1/65-9/65]) and the movies (United Artists' Twice Told Tales, starring Vincent Price [1963]) soon allowed the family to enjoy homes in both Corona del Mar, California, and Maui, Hawaii. Having long ago paid her dues, Evelyn had the right to be outspoken on Hollywood—and she was. In Doug McClelland's 1968 Film Fan Monthly profile, Evelyn recalled Universal, and harpooned Hollywood in general:

"They were a memorable experience, profitable, but strenuous, and I'm very happy they are over and behind me. In fact, as I look back, I feel it was a profession I was never really suited for. It was always nerve-wracking and a tremendous effort for me.

One reason I gave up acting was that I couldn't devote enough time to my husband and daughter, and the other was that I was sick and tired of all the lousy parts I was getting in lousy pictures. I only did them for the money and that was my downfall. I decided to do only an occasional TV show, but that was an awful strain for me and everyone at home, as I always got so nervous because I felt so rusty with the long waits between shows. I decided to relax, take up golf instead and be a good wife and mother. I haven't regretted it for one moment since! In fact, whenever I visit my husband on the set (and only when I HAVE to!), I never cease to wonder how I could have put up with the business as long as I did. I won't—or I should say I CAN'T—even do plays for our church or charities. Even the thought of it makes me turn green. I'll NEVER act again...

As far as the picture business, as a whole, is concerned, both my husband and I

feel it has completely gone to "pot"—in more ways than one. He and I—Dick especially—have both turned down scripts for movies and plays because we felt they had been written under the influence of LSD. Maybe we are squares, but we also can't stand the filth and perversion they are now showing as "entertainment." Consequently, we just don't go the movies anymore, and that's also one of the main reasons we want to move to Hawaii permanently, to get away from it all, to live a life more like we think God intended us to live: quiet, clean, healthy, but most of all peaceful—away from the man-made rat race!"

As such, it was a dream-come-true when Denning won the part of the Governor (originally offered to Lew Ayres) on CBS's Hawaii Five-O, shot, of course, in Hawaii. The show premiered September 26, 1968, and would run for 12 seasons, finally winding down in 1980 and beginning a whole new life in syndication. The Hawaii Five-O producers offered Evelyn the role of the Governor's wife; she would have no part of it.

Evelyn delighted in the beauty of Hawaii. The Denning's daughter, Dee, a graduate of San Diego State College (and harboring no interest at all in show business) eventually settled in Hawaii too, and delighted Evelyn and Dick with two granddaughters, Summer and Serena. Evelyn, who had seen so much temperament, indulgence, and heartbreak in her Hollywood years, felt enormously blessed. So many of her Universal colleagues had faced tragic endings in their personal lives; her legendary leading man, Lon Chaney, his voice nearly destroyed by throat cancer, his body sadly bloated, had shambled miserably through his final movies, confessing a terrible fear of becoming a "has-been" before his death in 1973. Evelyn had won a happy ending seemingly worthy of a melodrama heroine.

The memories of her Universal days, recalled from the quiet paradise of Hawaii, would be ambivalent for Evelyn. In her delightful, anecdote-filled Intro to The Golden Age of "B" Movies, Evelyn confessed to remembering those days "a bit nostalgically." However, when the successful book inspired many fans to serenade her with fan mail in Hawaii, Evelyn was surprisingly shocked and angry, resenting the "notoriety" she claimed the book gave her. Soon she withdrew entirely, becoming totally inaccessible to fans, referring any fan mail to her daughter.

"...apparently the good Lord had other plans for me, "Evelyn officially eulogized her career in The Golden Age of B Movies," and knew that eventually I'd be much happier away from it all on our beautiful Maui."

"Evie'e illness lasted over two years. It started with internal cancer. She went all through the chemotherapy which was just horrible; we were living on Maui, had to go to Honolulu three times a week for this chemotherapy, and she would react negatively to it and get very sick. It took about a year to go through all that. She of course lost her hair (it finally came back in), but finally Evie got a clean bill of health in about April of '85. We were going to celebrate—we bought a new car, and were planning trips...

Then, after just a few weeks, Evie started getting nauseous again.

So we went back, and the doctor said, 'The cancer is reactivated. The only thing we can do is repeat what we did before.' And Evie said, 'What do you mean? We have to start from the beginning, and I'm going to lose my hair, and all that again?' The doctor said, 'I'm afraid so.' And Evie said, 'No. I've had it. I just want to go up to our country place in Haiku and be out there alone with you and wait until the Good Lord calls me.'

So we were there, in the country in Haiku, from May until the end. We both prayed that the Lord would take her and relieve her, because I was giving her shots every half hour for the pain, and it was horrible...she got down to about 97 pounds. So weak, you know. Yet, I think the greatest time of our marriage was those last three months. We were alone, at our country place; we had plenty of time to think about the 43 years of being together: the good, the bad, and prosperous, the not-so-prosperous, the things we had gone through together. And we felt closer, I think, in those last months than we did even on our honeymoon. This is a feeling you only get after sharing your life, your joys, your problems, everything, together...
—Richard Denning

August, 1985. near the end, Dee joined her father with her dying mother: "It was wonderful for Evie and for Dee-Dee," says Denning.

The end finally came August 28, 1985. Evelyn Ankers was cremated and the ashes scattered at her beloved Maui. The cinema colony, remembering her considerable talent, perhaps envying her lifestyle and happiness, mourned.

And the World of Horror, Fantasy, and Science Fiction eulogized her as "Queen of the Horror Films."

Richard Denning is today happily remarried, with six stepchildren, and divides his time between Hawaii and California. He's very proud of his daughter Dee—"She's just a wonderful wife, mother, and everything else—I dearly love her." Denning is also proud that Dee is planning to write a full-scale biography of Evelyn Ankers. Dee Denning Dwyer told me in the Summer of 1990:

"The book will, of course, cover Mom's career, and Dad's; I've taped about 10 or 12 hours of interviews with him. There will be anecdotes about them, and other actors and actresses, but the book will be 'different'—very personal...

Mom worked quite a bit in South America, and I have all her scrapbooks, and now a friend is translating everything from Spanish into English, and I'm feeding all the information into a computer. The book might be a few years off; my oldest daughter is a junior in high school, and I imagine that when she has graduated, I'll have a lot more time. So I'm plugging away! Anything worth doing, as my Mom said, is worth doing right, and I want to do it thoroughly."

"Evie and I were very blessed. We were both active in the church, and to this day, my God and my Savior are the most important things in my life. I always feel I have the help of a supernatural power, and a couple of angels thrown in for good measure. Evie and I always had God as our unseen partner. And that was probably our greatest help."
—Richard Denning

Richard Denning, then in the Navy, visits wife Evelyn on the set of Deanna Durbin's His Butler's Sister, in which Evie played "the other woman."

When so many of us began watching Shock Theatre as children, perhaps we loved Evelyn Ankers because she looked like the beautiful princesses in the fairy tale books we slowly were outgrowing. As we grew older, we admired her loveliness, and thrilled time and again to the sensation of her scream; and, as the old Universal melodramas became lifelong friends to so many of us, we fully perceived her talent, her versatility, and the true magic she gave to The Wolf Man, The Ghost of Frankenstein, even Captive Wild Woman.

Perhaps, too, some of us sensed the depth and character that sparked her best performances, and that ironically led Evelyn to forsake Hollywood, avoid the tragic finales of so many of her contemporaries, live the life that she believed "God intended" her to live.

Still, today, six years after her death, nearly half-a-century after her best movies were made, Evelyn Ankers' legacy to Horror and Fantasy shines more brightly than ever.

And, after All Hallow's Eve at Universal City, after the beloved ghosts have dispersed into the realm of videocassettes and late show revivals, there will always echo, over the old Universal soundstages and high into the mountains, "I never drink—wine"..."It's alive!"...

And Evelyn Ankers' scream.

In a climactic scene (one of several) in Tobe Hooper's Lifeforce, three men have a fourth man, Dr. Armstrong, the warden of a mental institution, pinned to a table while one of the others, an astronaut named Carlsen, interrogates him. As he does so, the doctor's appearance changes, from Carlsen's point of view, from his own slightly feminine looks to those of the female extraterrestrial inhabiting his body, his voice synthesizing into an odd combination of the two. "I am the feminine in your mind," s/he tells Carlsen, for which he is struck in the face, hard. The doctor/alien, in turn, draws Carlsen down for a kiss, the astronaut shaking in resistance, Armstrong serene and his lips trembling in the anticipation, while the others look on in surprise. When they finally come together, the exchange of energy generates a maelstrom so violent that it hurls the observers against the wall and throws everything else in the room not nailed down into a spin. The scene ends with one man dead, Armstrong sedated, and the four of them hurtling on to the next hysterical sequence.

Such action serves as a key in unraveling a complex scheme of signs and associations found not only in this work, but in much of Hooper's film work to date, a body not wanting in controversy but mostly lacking in adequate critical appreciation. In several cases throughout the director's career, the encounter between one character and its sexless, androgynous, or hermaphroditic alter ego throws it into a crisis such as we see happen in the scene above, a trauma from which that character seldom recovers. The films themselves tend toward a sort of hermaphroditic condition, as well, being frequently caught between reality and dream, death and life, doom and redemption, action and mysticism, madness and control, all of these dichotomies mirrored in the confrontation between the masculine and the feminine, respectively. This involves the employment of a lot of phallic and uterine imagery throughout the course of the films—and with highly ambivalent attitudes toward them—their always apocalyptic conclusions taking place in the feminine space, or womb, indicating a return to primal origins and an often violent rebirth into the world. Hooper himself seems a ruined transcendentalist, sometimes seeing the redemptive powers in his own material yet more often finding that power deflated and negated by brute reality. It's the traditional Oedipal drama, in which the usually male character wrestles with his own (or others') destructive impulses, trying to unite with the regenerative feminine side of his personality; unfortunately, it's usually the angry masculine side which wins out in the end.

To illustrate, I want to focus on three films from Hooper's career so far that present an interesting suite of approaches to this theme, detailing the deterioration of an embattled optimism: these are the three made under contract with Cannon films from 1986 to 1987: Lifeforce, Invaders from Mars, and Texas Chainsaw Massacre Part 2 (which Hooper himself refers to as simply Saw 2). These selections offer themselves most readily by virtue of their immediacy, being the most recent and fully evolved expressions of Hooper's concerns to date, while also presenting a challenge due to their flawed natures: the production troubles which plagued them, well documented by the director himself in his chapter in John Russo's textbook on Making Movies, result in an often incomprehensible jumble rendering a decoding of the pictures' original intentions all the more necessary. Because of these problems (which themselves resulted in the films becoming monumental financial failures), as well as the limitations of the genre critics to whom he is held accountable, Hooper's status has sunk so low in estimation that, at the time of this writing, his latest film, Spontaneous Combustion, has been released directly to video cassette and cable television. It's time a more considerate critical eye was turned to these films in an effort to find a more rounded approach, armed with a fuller understanding and appreciation of this visionary talent.

The first time Carlsen encounters the female described above, it's in the main chamber of an alien craft discovered in the slipstream of Halley's Comet. The source

novel for the film, Colin Wilson's The Space Vampires, describes this chamber in architectural terms and relates it to the unconscious (Wilson is also the author of a volume on influential psychoanalyst C.G. Jung), but here the appearance is more biological, after the fashion of screenwriter Dan O'Bannon's earlier film, the 1979 Alien; with its thousands of egglike outgrowths, the place is clearly that of the womb, the origin of the human race. Among these eggs is a cluster of crystalline cases enclosing three fully formed humanoid bodies, with one of whom, a female, Carlsen establishes an inexplicable rapport from the first.

This sort of cavernous location serves as the focal point for much of the action of all three films, and can be related as well to other Hooper sets, from the huge, desiccated Marsten place of Salem's Lot (and its basement climax), the voracious closet and consuming pit of Poltergeist, and to the subterranean gearworks of The Funhouse. By the end of Lifeforce we will find ourselves in another such location, a huge catherdral, in which Carlsen and the space vampire are reunited before their assumption into the "mother" ship, which occurrence sparks the fertilization of the thousands of eggs on board. (This cathedral is also the site of a dream Carlsen has midway through the picture, reinforcing the connection between these wombs and the subconscious, especially as it is the subterranean crypt of the church from which they are ejaculated). Carlsen is himself reborn after this first encounter with the woman on the ship, as we see when he is recovered back on earth curled up in his tiny escape module—which lands, of course, in Hooper's home state of Texas (Carlsen now bearded like the director himself). The re/union is completed by impalement on a huge medieval sword, symbolic of their sexual union, the sword itself identical in shape to that of the alien ship where the drama began (the comparison most explicit in the computer graphic the astronauts see before coming upon the ship itself).

The circularity of this imagery is seen also in the oblong crystalline shells the aliens inhabit in their spaceship womb—the egg as coffin, and vice versa—and in the figure of the woman as not only traditional life-giver but "energy vampire" as well. The dead souls she is gathering serve as a revitalizing force for the dormant creatures back on the ship, these souls seen as lights coursing through—as new sperm cells—along its phallic shaft. We see this circularity also in the image of the comet itself, on a 76-year return cycle with the earth (approximating the average life span), and in the role of Dr. Hans Fallada (named after the German novelist, a secondary character in a scenario composed mainly of secondary characters: the narrative skips from protagonist to protagonist, as do the parasitic aliens themselves): not only is Fallada a biologist, he's an avocational thanatologist (one who possesses a death-wish), besides.

This roundelay of life and death gets carried even further, into questions of sexuality and gender. The uterine chamber of the mothership, for example, is contained

LIFEFORCE: The entrance to the alien spaceship. Besides its similarities to a giant iris with pupil, the canal also represents the female sexual apparatus.

within the phallic whole, and Armstrong's voice during interrogation is, as noted, a synthesis of male and female voices; the woman in the cathedral in the end, upright on a sarcophagus, is herself a phallus, and the focal point for the shaft of lights flowing up to the ship (Carlsen joining her as they unite for the final time, their upright position rendering neither of them sexually superior). Finally, a shot in the asylum dormitory, in which Carlsen interrogates a nurse whom the alien had until lately inhabited, depicts the girl and Carlsen, and at the same time framed between them as an intermediate personality is Carlsen's mirror image; on the wall behind is a poster of David Bowie. Soon after, Carlsen announces that he's become "a new life form" since his communion with the woman in outer space, meaning that he is now a cross between not only the species, but the sexes, too. The point of these zen obsessions and sexual ambiguities is that, much as he may resist it, Carlsen recognizes his destiny to unite his sexual selves and to return to "the original oneness of things," as critic Barbara Creed calls it, and to the universe itself.

Hooper's movies are full of such characters in transition. Carol Ann in Poltergeist is the first to be openly regarded as such, in the speech Zelda Rubinstein delivers midway through that film, when she speaks of the girl's suspension between life and death. Mostly, this transformation involves a dismantling of that character's preconceptions of the world on encountering a form or class of life strictly not its own, as in The Funhouse, and Hooper's second film, Eaten Alive, but in Lifeforce it takes a more optimistic turn (though certainly no less troubling).

Curiously, for the horror/sci-fi genre, it is the ostensible (male) heroes who act the most brutally; the "monster" is in fact serene and warmly desirable. The most forceful of these characters is British Intelligence investigator Colin Caine, who arrives at the Space Research Center in which the alien is interned immediately after she escapes as if to suggest a balance; his pushy character contrasts the girl's equanimity, pitting him opposite her celestial nature, his governmental status suggesting an earthly force of order and reality. Colonel Carlsen, Caine's twin in duplicate initials (CC), teams up with him for the greater part of the film, the partnership drawing Carlsen farther and farther from the psychological symbiosis he enjoys with the female, with whom he cannot reunite until he separates from Caine. Carlsen is torn between the peaceful, weightless, more "feminine" state he enjoyed in space, and the angry, violent, "masculine" condition he experiences while on earth, the dilemma most clearly illustrated in the episode described in our opening paragraph. At the same time as Caine "grounds" Colonel Carlsen, Carlsen in turn draws Caine farther from the surface reality he represents, to the extent that the film's occasional jarring cuts to scenes of mayhem in the streets outside the several insular military and scientific installations and mental and governmental institutions seem crazy and discontinuous, as though dropped in from another movie. In fact, the characters by this point are so far removed from reality that they have as little awareness of what's going on outside their worlds as we do.

Soon after the confrontation with Armstrong, Carlsen and Caine part company, Carlsen having by now assimilated characteristics of both cosmic and earthly

entities. Both men must then journey through the chaotic city by themselves, until all three meet at the cathedral (the womb, or origin: it is at this point that the woman reveals his true nature by informing him, "You have always been one of us") and Carlsen's reintegration and ascension can take place.

Carlsen is peculiarly equipped for such an epiphany because of his non-domineering, non-voyeuristic attitude toward the alien (remember, she appears nude throughout) from the beginning. Where other characters eye her lasciviosuly, through visors and capsules and windows and monitors, Carlsen shares an immediate intuitive connection with her; not only is he not inhibited by all these separating devices (which she herself blows away so effortlessly, in the scene of her escape from the scientific compound where she shatters all the windows and doors in front of her), he can literally see through her eyes at times, and inhabit her mind. By placing these surrogate screens between the characters and his frequently naked subject, however, Hooper toys with our own relation to the movie itself, in the tradition of Alfred Hitchcock, his acknowledged inspiration. Just as the men in the film condescend to the alien in her apparent vulnerability (only to be surprised by the sheer force of her power), the viewer should also be alerted to the hidden potency behind what we may regard only for its superficial allure—for, when one relates to this "Other" openly rather than exploitively, the result is a mutually rewarding symbiosis and, ultimately, ascension and regeneration, difficult only as long as one resists it.

Carlsen's return to his point of origin bears similarities to the Hardestys' return to their grandfather's house in the first Chainsaw movie, and to the homecoming of David Soul's writer character in Salem's Lot. In the first film, it means the obliteration of Sally Hardesty's personality; in the second, the baffling elimination of the redemptive feminine (Bonnie Bedelia) along with the destructive masculine (Reggie Nalder, as Barlow) and the decidedly ambiguous leveling of David Soul's character, as well. Here, the forces are reconciled (albeit, in violent fashion, with the impaling on the sword), the only time in Hooper's work—for, after such total, cosmic resolution, where could a filmmaker go, but backward?

Hooper's next project for Cannon was a remake of William Cameron Menzies' 1953 cult sci-fi classic, Invaders from Mars, an expressionistic rendering of one boy's pre-adolescent encounter with his own nightmare images of gender and adulthood, as played out in his fantasy of alien invasion. Just as Carlsen, in Lifeforce, was caught between masculinity and femininity and the earthly and the cosmic, Invaders prepubescent hero is on the verge of a major life transition, when issues of independence and sexual differentiation will become a prominent force in his life; right now, however, they remain only vague notions, the stuff of disturbing dreams.

Menzies begins his film inside this dream, his hero already asleep, but Hooper, typically, blurs the distinction entirely between dream life and waking reality. Although his opening image, of the boy (here called David Gardner) and his father lying on picnic benches watching a meteor shower in the night sky, occurs before the boy actually goes to sleep, the framing of this shot lends the image a distinctly dreamlike quality, the camera slowly spiraling down from space, whose vast reaches suggest the depths of the unconscious from which the nightmare will emerge (the shot a recapitulation of a similar device in Lifeforce, bearing an equally hallucinatory effect). The climax to Menzies' film, which is based on the association of a time bomb with the boy's alarm clock—signaling the end of the dream—never really occurs; in the end, it is a thunderstorm which wakes the boy, as he runs to the window to witness for the second time the aliens' arrival (suggesting not its actual occurrence, but the re-starting of the dream). By the end of Hooper's film, however, the boy is seen not in his own room, looking out the window and exclaiming "Gee whiz!" (as does his predecessor), but in his parents' room, looking in, and witnessing a scene so shocking the director himself doesn't dare depict it.

Again, Hooper and O'Bannon (again Hooper's collaborator, with Don Jakoby) have modified the appearance of the alien's lair from the source material, and again that chamber has taken on a distinctly biological look, this time with many veined, membraneous tunnels or canals leading into and out of the central set; the craft itself resembles a pair of fused ovaries, making it clear that we are located, once again, inside the womb. (This association of the alien lair with the womb and with the child's origins is made clear even in an in-joke, in which one of the cops investigating the pit—played by Jimmy Hunt, the child actor of the 1953 version—remarks, "Gee, I haven't been up here since I was a kid!")

This location parallels the boy's own house, which serves as a real-life symbol of childhood warmth and security. (As his father notes reassuringly toward the end, his dream is filled with images from the day before, given frightening resonance.) It's doubled also in the boy's school, whose long hallways recall the pit's subterranean tunnels, its dark and yawning basement suggesting the core of the ship, a tunnel finally linking the two locations physically as well as associatively. It is, in fact, a second womb, a second location of nurturing and sustenance, from which he will emerge to face the outside world. Louise Fletcher, performing a variation on her Nurse Ratched character from One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, plays Mrs. McKeltch, tyrant of her science class and principal toady of the invaders, who tries to run the space ship as she does her classroom (the alien drones, resembling frog-legged ovaries with teeth, only too happy to gobble her up in the end when David revolts). The school fills in for the police station of the original, although the two are seen as being in alliance here, as when David (Hunter Carson) observes McKeltch conspiring with a policeman in the school's darkened halls; at another point, that same cop echoes the words of David's ally, the school nurse Miss Magnuson: "We're here to help." ("Oh, I know that's what I'm supposed to do," she adds quickly, "but I mean it.") These institutions and his abhorrence of them suggest David's Huck Finn

LIFEFORCE: Another entrance canal to the alien "mother" ship. Shots like these resemble more the internal explorations of films like Fantastic Voyage and Innerspace than other worldly adventures such as Planet of the Vampires or It.

resistance to civilizing authority, in much the same way as he protests his mother's imposition on his idyll with the father in the beginning of the film, when she comes outside to break up their stargazing and hustle the both of them off to bed.

In the dream, then, the mother is broken into the separate characters of the authoritarian McKeltch and the healing, nurturing figure, Linda Magnuson—whom McKeltch twice calls "sister"—played, in a casting coup, by Carson's natural mother, Karen Black. Each of these figures gives "birth" to the boy, in a figurative sense, Magnuson when she urges David out her office window, McKeltch when she abducts him by pulling him out of Linda's car window. This divided attitude toward the mother reflects David's transitional age and emotions, a theme carried further in the image of the rude wooden fence dividing his back yard, the hemispherical appearance of the alien ship, and the seemingly incidental detail of the aliens' strike against the nearby NASA space project taking place at midnight, the border between days. (The rocket is, of course, a Gemini, for the Twins.)

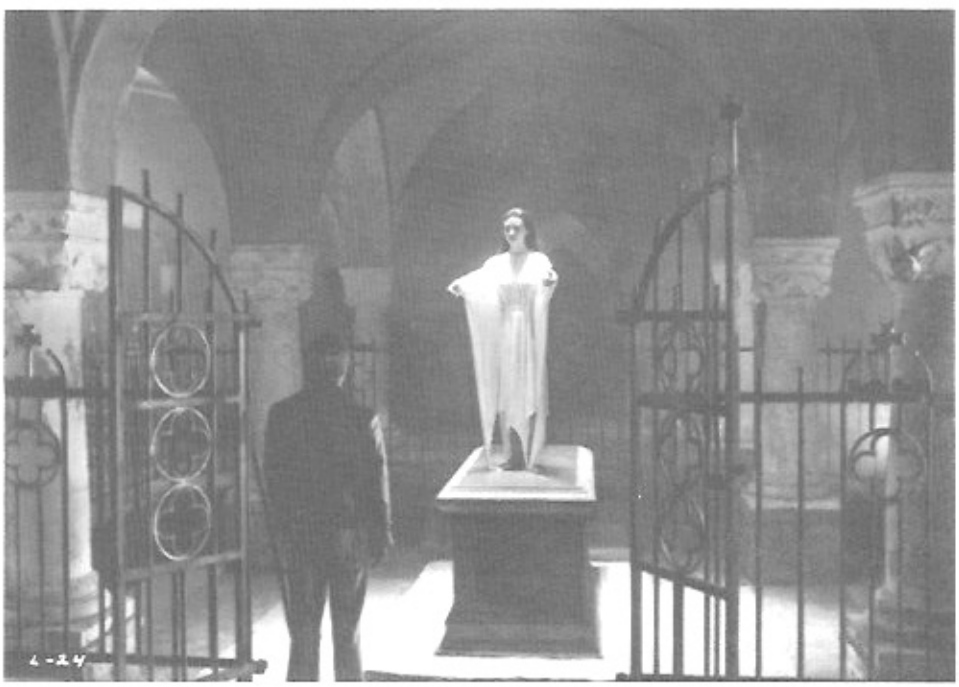
This military/scientific installation provides a masculine counterpart to the feminine location of the school, which is mostly dominated by women, and the neutral location of the home, which is equally governed by the mother and father; at its center is the phallic rocket. It is presided over by one of two representatives of David's divided father figure, the feisty boy's-best-friend, General "Mad Dog" Wilson (the surname a carryover from a different character in the 1953 version, the chemist William Wilson, that name borrowed from the Poe story of the same title, in which its dream-figure narrator eliminates his alter-ego, representative of order and logic, in order to perpetuate the dream-state). Unlike in Menzies' version, however, this rocket is successfully dynamited by the aliens' human pawns, as is their own lair at the climax (which we understand from Lifeforce and the 1953 film to represent the unconscious and dream-world), signifying Hooper's demolition of both reality and fantasy in this film—as we saw in his opening scene, in which the two are curiously undifferentiated.

Menzies' film opens with a shot of the boy's telescope pointing out his bedroom window, an image Hooper footnotes in his own film; its suggestion of sexuality is finally expanded into the remake's most prominent concern. The alien leader, which in the original is represented as a tentacled head in a globe (suggesting the boy's sleeping mind), is now figured as a brainlike creature with rudiform legs, attached to a phallic stalk which emerges from and retracts into a vaginal opening in the wall. It is, therefore, malevolent complement to General Wilson's character (completing the doubling of David's dream father figures), its location within the lair suggesting a dream equivalent of the neutral or hermaphroditic Gardner house. Its emergence and reemergence into the cave also suggests sexual penetration—taking the film its final step, away from concerns of gender and more toward the as-yet indefinite sexual anxieties of the preadolescent boy. For, not only have the aliens invaded David's world, but their project here, we discover, is to thwart the NASA space mission which threatens to, in turn, "penetrate" their space. This fear is also at the center of the climactic action, in which Linda Magnuson is about to be drilled by a monstrous hypodermic probe, the means by which the aliens enslave their human subjects. If, as one critic has suggested, the child in his helplessness possesses traditionally feminine characteristics, and the more autonomous adult possesses masculine characteristics, then David, the character most dependent upon others yet at the same time the most active thinker and initiator of the action (it is, after all, his dream), is both. His project, then, is to protect the mother figure from the penetration which would mean her loss and the establishing of his own sexual difference. (This is, basically, the opposite of Carlsen's aim in Lifeforce.)

As its repeated mention makes clear, the ship's landing site and the scene of this drama is "over the hill" from the seat of David's comfort and security, the home, indicating the impending maturity he resists. In "reality," his dad is a peer, staying up late and even swearing with him outside, but in his dream he is a morose and hostile authoritarian, frequently encouraging and even threatening him to take the trek across into the aliens' lair. In order to power their operations, however, these aliens need copper; so, when the boy is trapped inside their tunnels—suggestive, again, of biological origin and home—it is the penny his father has given him for his coin collection which provides the power he needs to blast his way out, using one of the aliens' weapons. His father, in other words, has provided him with the "coin" or "exchange" of his own passage out of the womb and into the adult world. With the demolition of the womb/lair, his chance of return is sealed, his psychological connection to home and origin—as well as to his mother and the feminine within himself—severed, and the horror of the final shot is set in place.

When he realizes that his father has fallen under the aliens' control, his reaction is one of fear and distrust; his discovery of the mother's alien-ation, on the other hand, is an emotional demonstration of loss. Whereas this realization in the 1953 film occurs in the police station, here it takes place in the same room in which the child wakes at the conclusion of his dream. In the earlier scene, he watches from the window as his father leads his mother, hand in hand, "over the hill," and the audience recognizes the romantic allusion the child cannot; his protracted cry of "Mom!" signals the finality of her loss to him. In the end, however (again, differently from the 1953 original), he wakes to the sound of the space craft landing, rushes into his parents' room instead of to the window, and shouts "No!" as the camera freeze-frames on his renewed terror and loss. But what could he see there? The aliens have only just landed and could not yet have taken control of the parents. Apparently, he sees the only other thing a child could encounter while bursting in on his parents' room in the middle of the night: he sees them having sex. (This is the primal scene of which Freud wrote, the point at which the child's Oedipal drama becomes complete and irreversible. It is also a reprise of a similar scene in Poltergeist in which the son walks in on a bit of romantic horseplay between his parents in their bed-

LIFEFORCE: The climax showing the womblike cathedral crypt in which the upright phallic alien awaits Colonel Carlsen (also the scene of Carlsen's dream of intercourse with the woman).



room, complete with the same flashing lights we see here.) He is alone in the world now (as he is in the frame), of the world now that he has knowledge of sex, and the nightmare has only just begun. Severed from his parents' exclusive world, he is thrust out into the great world again, forced to go on to forge his own identity.

The unity expressed in sexual and metaphysical terms in Lifeforce and in terms of family and identity in Invaders—and the deterioration of these conditions from film to film—comes to utter chaos in Saw 2. The shift in focus from male characters in the first film to a neutral main character in the second to the female protagonist of this film reflects a similar regression: the female in Lifeforce, Hooper's first big-budget solo motion picture after the triumph of Poltergeist with Steven Spielberg, is pictured as an ambiguous regenerative figure who focuses all the violent energies of the men around her; the female is similarly besieged and at siege in Invaders, its boy hero frozen in terror at her loss in the end; so by the last frames of Saw 2 she will be reduced, from her cosmic genesis and earthly housewifery, to a primal savagery, heralding the conclusion to Hooper's mini-saga.

The family which was at crisis in Invaders is now almost completely shattered. As Hooper fills us in in Russo's book, Stretch, the ambiguously named female focus of Saw 2, was intended as the daughter of a former girlfriend of Dennis Hopper's detective character, Lefty Enright (many of whose scenes were lifted whole from the picture by its distributors); it may be possible, then, to assume some blood relation between the two nicknamed figures. Stretch's only other family here is her brotherly engineer and would-be lover L.G. (played by Chainsaw's sound man, Lou Perriman); Lefty's legitimate bloodline included the brother and sister pair annihilated in the original film. As in the original Chainsaw, the family of murderers (here called the "Sawyers") consists only of two brothers and a character who may be their father—though this is never definite, as with the barker-monster relationship in The Funhouse—plus a mostly-dead grandfather and his entirely dead and mummified wife. This absence of a mother figure suggests the degenerate conditions to which male society devolves in Hooper's world without the civilizing, humanizing feminine influence, while adding a suggestion of inbreeding made likely by the virtual enshrining of the grandmother, as we see at the end of the movie. (Those boys had to come from somewhere.)

The film establishes Texas as the home of macho destructiveness and bravado from the very first scene by introducing a pair of frat boys driving in for a big, unspecified football game. (This game serves as vague background vehicle for the action to ensue, much like the comet that was such a prominent though nebulous presence in Lifeforce.) Tying up Stretch's radio request line with their lewd innuendo and shooting up mailboxes on the way, the boys suddenly find themselves in deeper than they had bargained, playing "chicken" with a huge, seemingly driverless pickup truck. In an apparent parody of Who's Got the Biggest Phallus, the passenger of the anonymous truck whips out a monstrous chainsaw that makes a joke of the boys' pistol, and proceeds to carve up the sports car and its inhabitants. Later in the movie, when Lefty (whom one cop bemusedly refers to as "cowboy") goes to a 'saw shop to equip himself for his final showdown with the family (who hole up in the ruins of a Texas Battle Land amusement park, signifying the archaic nature of their macho heritage and America's own feudal past), the store owner, previously frightened by the lawman's seriousness, becomes hysterical at the vigor and aggressiveness of his "test drive": in essence, he's no less dangerous than the Sawyers in their adoration of Grandpa and his legendary killing talents. (Even K-OKLA, Stretch's radio station, is located above a gun shop.)

As the station's call letters indicate, the action of Saw 2 takes place at the border between Texas and Oklahoma, the family apparently having moved north to evade justice after the events of the first picture. The members each have names or nicknames now, suggesting a further coming into light and focus; similarly, the family's once-stationary barbecue is now a mobile van operation, serving as a bizarre parody of "upward mobility." At the same time, the hulking Leatherface's dawning sexual awareness—as revealed in the film's notorious ice-chest scene—hints at an awakening maturity not evident in the character in the first film. While all of this indicates a movement up from the subconscious, as the arrival of the aliens from deep space suggests in the previous two films, the underground location of their lair and Drayton's hysterical insistence on privacy (the slamming door of the back room still one of the most vivid images from Saw 1) serve to remind us that they are yet subterranean, nocturnal creatures, as attested by the shock we register at the sunlight in the film's finale.

This border carries the sexually ambivalent themes of Lifeforce and the conflicts of maturation in Invaders through, with characters more explicitly ambivalent than in the original film. When the Boys finally track Stretch down for rebroadcasting her tape of the mutilation of the teenagers in their car, their preadolescent attitude toward her recalls the "He-man Woman-haters' Club" of old Little Rascals adventures and the kind of codes which dictate that girls are icky, when you should be playing combat instead. (Leatherface's brother Chop Top—so named for the metal plate in his head, a souvenir from Vietnam—wants to reopen the park under the name 'Nam Land, a reminder that Lyndon Johnson, the man responsible for the escalation of the conflict in that country, was himself a Texan.) As one critic has pointed out, Stretch stands in for the typical slasher film heroine, the lack of sexual identification in her name underlining her forthrightness and independence. When Leatherface, in one of the film's grisliest moments of Grand Guignol, trims off the face of her companion L.G. and drapes it over her own features, it is to attribute to her the first signs of an outwardly masculine identity; by the time she appropriates the chainsaw in the film's conclusion, she has become the violent reverse of Carlsen at the end of Lifeforce, as insane as her counterpart in Saw 1, but deadly now for her reduction to the family's own degenerate level. It's the feminine reciprocal of the Oedipus drama: her femininity is destroyed as she adopts the artillery of the masculine world; rather than "ascending," as does Carlsen, or simply experiencing a trauma, as does David Garnder,

INVADERS FROM MARS: The biological interior of the alien lair. Note the eyeball/vagina, from which emerges the phallic alien brain (behind Louise Fletcher).

THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE PART 2: The decrepit lair of the cannibal Sawyer family. Notice the tubes in the background (like intestinal/digestive canals) and obsolete furnishings.

this is seen as an unqualified degradation.

Leatherface himself, in his apron and wig, suggests a measure of gender confusion (he has even gone so far as to be labeled—wrongly, I think—a transvestite), so that when he dances with his girl-in-a-man's-face, the identities are so abyss-mal that it would take more of a psychoanalyst than Chop Top to unravel them all. (His brother is content to call him "bitch," a common term among homosexuals and crossdressers.) By the ending, Leatherface will have been gored by Lefty's saw (in a graphically sexual shot that pushes him over the border into femininity), Drayton emasculated, Chop Top kneed in the groin, the saw torn from the grandmother's lap—leaving a hole in her abdomen reminiscent of the womb-like lair below—and Stretch finally phallusized, spinning with the saw above her head like Leatherface at the conclusion of Saw1.

In order to achieve this violent rebirth, however, Stretch must first go down into their world, beneath the amusement park. (She does this, significantly, by falling.) This happens mostly by accident, as she is unwittingly chased by Lefty himself through the long entranceway, which resembles nothing so much as the ribcage of a dinosaur snake (the obsolete fossil phallus); at every juncture below, it will be Lefty again who railroads her down the wrong passageway or seals off the right one. The cavern hideout is, of course, analogous to the alien lair of Invaders, with its central chamber and endless series of tunnels, and the alien craft and cathedral of Lifeforce. It is, again, the primal location, the shared source, the womb. (Reinforcement of its internal association comes when Lefty kicks at a stone wall, disgorging a flood of entrails as it caves in, and in the music, which outside had been pounding and rhythmic, but here becomes moaning and respiratory.) Here, however, the womb is dusty and barren, littered with the skeletal remains of its inhabitants' victims, robbed of its usual associations with life and birth.

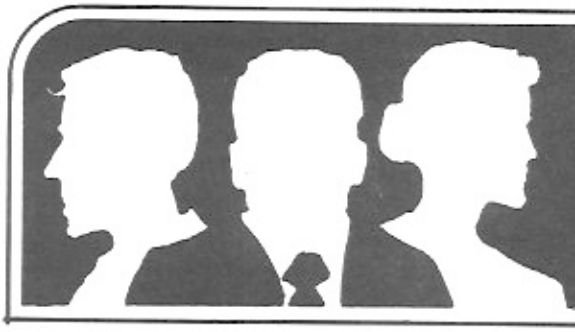
When Lefty (who at first resists the little lady Stretch's aid but finally realizes he can't do without her) is preparing to storm the lair, he prays, "Lord, show me what I fear, so I don't fear it no more." This attitude toward the chamber suggests courage in facing up to not only the horrors of the subconscious, but also (for the rogue cop cowboy) the mysterious Other, the female. It's also an assault upon his past—a past which included his romance with Stretch's mother, in addition to the loss of his family—a reclamation by annihilation. Hooper's camera probes this space much as it does the various doorways and passageways elsewhere, hurtling through entrances and orifices, gliding in and out of the main chamber during his recreation of the dinner scene from Saw 1. In this scene as well as others, he is back in his element, freed from the thrill-a-minute careening of his last two adventures and allowed again to experiment in what he specializes, the protracting of a single scene of terror beyond all sensible bounds.

Lefty, the self-proclaimed Lord of the Harvest, arrives singing "Bringing in the Sheaves," the agricultural references suggesting a contrast to the carnivorous stock-in-trade of the Sawyers and a reverence for the regenerative nature of Mother Earth; the full force of his rage is kept leashed until he sees the flower of Texas womanhood, Stretch, in their capture. She escapes and makes her way out of the Pit pursued by Chop Top, breaking out into the light of day and scrambling up a precipice—only to come across the bizarre shrine to phallic womanhood, the seemingly gigantic mummy of Grandma clutching her chainsaw. With this saw, Stretch sends Chop Top tumbling back into the cavern as into her own unconscious just as Drayton blows it up—the demolition of the feminine space, indicating the loss of femininity as well as her sanity—and she is left inside the phallic rock formation, herself and the saw, the trucks on the highway in the background evidence of her rebirth into the masculine world.

"Saturn is in retrograde," as one character notes in the original Chainsaw, signaling the backward, downward spiral of events to follow, and Hooper carries forward that premonition with Saw 2. His cautious optimism in Lifeforce centered on its (potentially dangerous) seductive female who dominates the scene of reintegration and the birthplace of a race; it turns pessimistic in Invaders at the scene of differentiation and maturation, and finally devolves to the nihilism of this last film, the cosmic womb brought to earth as ambivalent menace, where it deteriorates into a barren den of murderous, in-bred, woman-hating males. The trajectory of the Woman herself in these later films—variously desired, loved, and loathed; patronized, revolted against, and victimized; superior, equal, finally equally degenerate—similarly tracks the course of a philosophy in retrograde. Where once it was possible to commune with that essence, that wild creative force, the protagonist (as well as, we may infer, the filmmaker and the audience) is suddenly, irreversibly separated from it, until all are finally degraded by its loss and decay. After such tragic conclusion, it's no wonder it took Hooper three years to find a suitable followup.

Yet now that he's proven he can still terrify by returning to his own origins, his own nihilistic roots (producing his own arguable masterpiece in Saw 2 in the process), maybe Hooper can proceed to rebuild his vision into one less devastating, one more affirmative, possibly more commercial. Although his talent seems to flourish when testing an audience's limits (as well as its patience) by keeping his material always tottering on the edge of control, successes such as Poltergeist and Salem's Lot demonstrate a director fully in control of his material when allowed that control. Even when troubled by production difficulties, however, the rich reservoir of implications beneath the surface of his texts indicates an artist whose vision can surmount any tactical roadblock and demonstrates the necessity to begin evaluating this most valuable filmmaker with a new set of critical standards. He's the best in his field right now; we can't afford to lose him.

FANEX 5 will occur when this issue hits the stands...August 10-11, 1991. Guests John Agar, Yvette Vickers, and Richard Gordon are the latest lineup to hit Baltimore. But FANEX 6 is already set for August 1992. If you haven't been to FANEX, why not. Good things do not last forever. Get on our mailing list and plan to hit Baltimore, meet the MidMar crew, and get involved. Write: FANEX, P. O. Box 6220, Baltimore, MD 21206



FORGOTTEN FACES OF FANTASTIC FILMS

by Jim Coughlin

HALLIWELL HOBBES (1877-1962)

Halliwell Hobbes was an extremely versatile actor who brought an air of refinement and culture to his craft through his manner of speech and appearance. His acting career spanned more than fifty years, mostly in the theatre, but also marked by roles in well over one hundred films and significant appearances on television during its "Golden Age." He was commonly seen on screen as butlers and valets, as well as police constables, statesmen, and elderly relatives. He played opposite a wide spectrum of performers, from George Arliss to the Bowery Boys. Hobbes' contributions to the horror/fantasy genre include portrayals in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932), Dracula's Daughter (1936), Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941), The Undying Monster (1942), and The Invisible Man's Revenge (1944). Although he is classified herein as a "forgotten face," Halliwell Hobbes' distinctive long countenance and balding pate make him recognizable to most old movie buffs.

Herbert Halliwell Hobbes was born in Stratford-on-Avon, England, on November 16, 1877. He was educated in Stratford and later Trinity College, studying law before finally selecting the stage as his profession. Hobbes made his theatrical debut in January 1898 in Glasgow, Scotland, with F. R. Benson's Repertoire Company. Over the next ten years, Hobbes toured many areas of the world, such as South Africa and the West Indies, with various theatrical troupes that included such stage luminaries as Ellen Terry and Mrs. Patrick Campbell. At the London Lyceum in March 1908, Hobbes portrayed Tybalt in "Romeo and Juliet" and soon became established in the West End theatre community. He played Sir Walter Blunt in "King Henry IV" (Part I - May 1909), Pope Pius IX in "The Eternal Question" (August 1910), and Dr. Rank in "A Doll's House" (February 1911). In the spring of 1911, Hobbes toured as Sherlock Holmes in "The Speckled Band." He then sailed to Australia with Ethel Irving's company. Back in England, Hobbes was seen as Horatio in "Hamlet" at King's Hall, Covent Garden, March 1913. He returned to Australia with Lewis Waller's troupe, assaying roles like Bob Heathfield in "A Fair Highwayman" (September 1913).

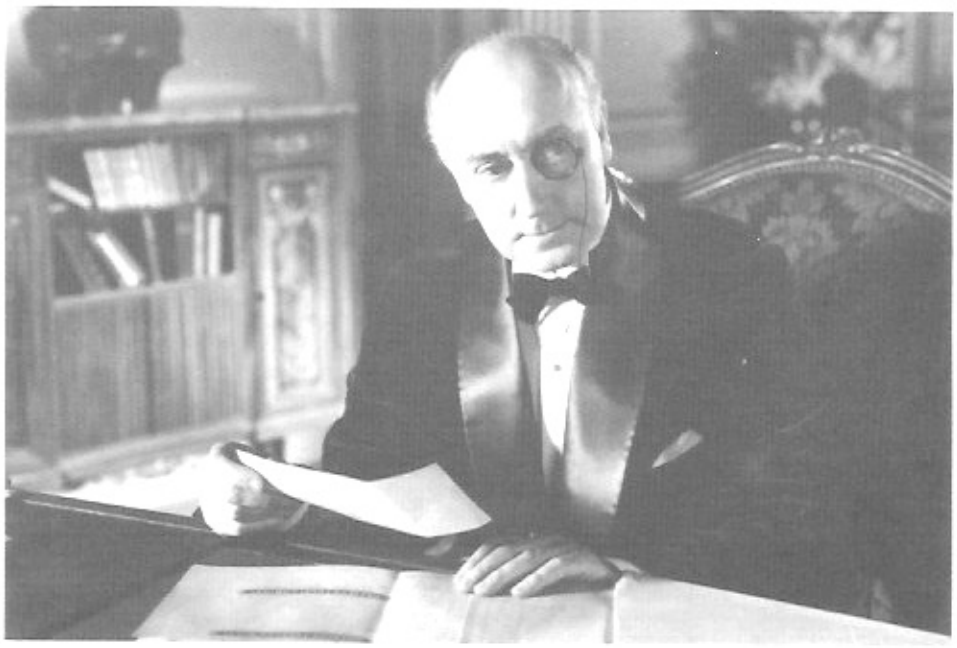
With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Hobbes joined the British Army and was commissioned a Lieutenant in the 7th Battalion, the Buffs. Subsequently he was promoted to Captain. After being discharged from the military in April 1919, Hobbes was back on stage within a month, playing Captain de Corlaix in "In the Night Watch." Hobbes renewed his acquaintance with London theatregoers with portrayals like Dr. Livesey in "Treasure Island" (December 1922) and Edward Eversley in "Success" (June 1923), before venturing to the United States.

At the Cort Theatre in New York, Hobbes won critical acclaim as Father Hyacinth in Molnar's "The Swan" (October 1923). Also in New York, he was seen as Colonel Whitaker in "Easy Virtue" (December 1925), Rev. Holdsworth in "Slaves All" (December 1926), and Leonard Rivers in "The Adventurous Age" (February 1927). Over the next two years, Hobbes journeyed back and forth between the London and Broadway stage before making his film debut in 1929.

Jealousy (1929) featured Hobbes as the scheming Rigaud, who poses as star Jeanne Eagels' guardian before being killed by Fredric March. Hobbes next played the Earl of Balkerry in Lucky in Love (1929). He portrayed Stephen Spettigue in Charley's Aunt (1930), Ruddock in Grumpy, Lord St. Arran in Scotland Yard (1930), Larkin in Bachelor Father (1931), and Hopkins in Five and Ten (1931). Portending things to come, Hobbes played Smythe, the Schuyler family's snooty butler, in Platinum Blonde (1931). Hobbes appeared in The Woman Between (1931), was the Seignour in The Right of Way (1931), and was Roget in The Sin of Madelon Claudet (1931), which starred Helen Hayes.

Hobbes' first horror film role was that of the pompous Brigadier General Carew in Paramount's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932), with Fredric March as the title character(s). Carew, an overprotective father, refuses to grant Jekyll permission to marry his daughter Muriel (Rose Hobart) in the immediate future. This refusal provides the impetus for Jekyll's delving into experimental drugs. On the day he is to announce his engagement to

JEALOUSY (Paramount, 1929): The New York Times found Hobbes to be "excellent" in his portrayal of Rigaud. Hobbes would use this same portrait in casting directories well into the 1940s.



Muriel, Jekyll deteriorates into Hyde, attacks his beloved, and kills Gen. Carew, before his eventual downfall. Hobbes played his part well in what is often considered the definitive screen version (of many) of R. L. Stevenson's classic tale.

Also in 1932, Halliwell Hobbes was featured in the following roles: Lord Litchfield in The Devil's Lottery, the florist in Forbidden, Kibbee in Love Affair, Robert Montgomery's father (Mr. Smith) in Lovers Courageous, Hilton in Man About Town, Phillips in The Menace, a prospective tenant (with Charles Laughton as the murderer) in Payment Deferred, and Baron von Sturm in Six Hours to Live. Hobbes was the butler to Evers (Clive Brook) in If I Were Free (1933), and also played a butler in Should Ladies Behave? (1933). He was Mr. Felton in Looking Forward, Churchill in Midnight Mary (1933), Malcolm Dearing in A Study in Scarlet (1933, with Reginald Owen as Sherlock Holmes), and appeared in Lady for a Day (1933). The Masquerader (1933), starring Ronald Colman in a dual role, had Hobbes as Brock, the valet to Sir John Chilcote (Colman), who coaches Loder (Also Colman) to impersonate his master.

Hobbes had a bit as a bobby in Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back (1934). He played Clarendon in All Men are Enemies (1934), Sir Walter Carrister in British Agent (1934), the English ambassador in Madame Du Barry (1934), Bollard in Rip Tide (1934), Colonel Dawson Ames in Mandalay (1934), Mr. Chase in Double Door (1934), Dr. Lorenzo in I am Suzanne (1934), and was seen in We Live Again (1934). The Key (1934), with William Powell and Colin Clive as adversaries in 1920's Ireland, included Hobbes as the General. Hobbes returned to his domestic domain, but this time as a sinister butler named Skinner, in Menace (1934).

Hobbes was third-billed as Father Joseph in Cardinal Richelieu (1935), starring George Arliss. He played Lord Sunderland in Captain Blood (1935), Paulet in Follies Begere (1935), Sir Leopold Fischer in Father Brown, Detective (1935), Theodore in Millions in the Air (1935), and Sir Stephen Barr in The Right to Live (1935). Jalna (1935) included Hobbes as Ernest, one of the elderly sons (C. Aubrey Smith was the other) of Whiteoak family matriarch Jessie Ralph. Hobbes also took a turn as the chief of police in Charlie Chan in Shanghai (1935).

Dracula's Daughter (1935), starring Gloria Holden, had Hobbes as Constable Hawkins, who, with fellow policeman Billy Bevan, investigates what has transpired at Carfax Abbey (supposedly picking up right at the conclusion of the '31 Dracula). The two first find Renfield's body at the foot of the enormous staircase and then discover Dracula impaled by a stake in his own coffin. When the still-loitering Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) confesses to the latter deed, the baffled pair arrest him.

Other 1936 film roles for Hobbes were: Oliver Warren in Give Me Your Heart, Cambaceres in Hearts Divided, Prof. Howard in Here Comes Trouble, Mr. Gordon in Rose Marie, the butler Buel in Spendthrift, and parts in Love Letters of a Star and Whipsaw. Hobbes portrayed Lord Raglan of Crimean War fame in the story of Florence Nightingale (Kay Francis), The White Angel (1936). As Dr. Joseph Lister, Hobbes praised Paul Muni as the title character in The Story of Louis Pasteur (1936).

In a film with a fantasy angle, Hobbes played Jeremiah Adams in Maid of Salem (1937). He displayed a comedic flair as Count Strunsky in Fit for a King (1937), starring Joe E. Brown. As Dean Meredith of Winfield College, Hobbes was part of Varsity Show (1937), a Dick Powell musical. Hobbes commonly appeared in costume dramas, as roles in the following indicate: The Archbishop in The Prince and the Pauper (1937), Parnell (1937), Dominic Campbell in Kidnapped (1938), and Sir John Galt in Storm Over Bengal (1938). He played John, the butler, in The Jury's Secret (1938) and also was a butler in Service De Luxe (1938). Hobbes portrayed Professor Bernard Goodman in Bulldog Drummond's Peril (1938) and was the vicar in the Reginald Owen A Christmas Carol (1938).

One of Hobbes' most memorable and comedic roles was that of DePinna, one of the many eccentric characters in the Vanderhof household, in Frank Capra's You Can't Take it With You (1938). DePinna works with explosives in the basement, but is at his most amusing, dressed like a Greek discus thrower, posing for "artist" Spring Byington. This film is loaded with fine performers and funny moments, but Hobbes holds his own throughout.

Hobbes was Dobbs, the butler hired by the Hardy family when they believe they've inherited a huge sum, in The Hardy's Ride High (1939), and was the butler in Remember? (1939). He was a doctor in The Light That Failed (1939), starring Ronald Colman. Other noteworthy parts for Hobbes at this juncture of his career were: Dean Burton in Naughty But Nice (1939), the British chaplain in Nurse Edith Cavell (1939), Captain Mathews in Pacific Liner (1939), Dr. Lovelake in Tell No Tales (1939), the vicar in Waterloo Bridge (1940), a judge in The Lady With Red Hair (1940), an astronomer in The Sea Hawk (1940), Burton in Third Finger, Left Hand (1940), and the Lord Chancellor in The Earl of Chicago (1940). Hobbes took a brief hiatus from films to return to the Broadway stage as Capulet in "Romeo and Juliet" (May 1940).

In the fine fantasy Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941), Hobbes portrayed Sisk. He was in good form as the Rev. Nelson, who begs his famous son (Laurence Olivier) to give up the title character (Vivien Leigh) in That Hamilton Woman (1941). Hobbes played Doris Lloyd's husband, Mr. Barrie, in Journey for Margaret (1942). He was Purdy in Son of Fury (1942), Bennett in The War Against Mrs. Hadley (1942), and General Armstrong in To Be or Not to Be (1942). As Walton, Hobbes returned to realm of horror in The Undying Monster (1942), Fox's underrated atmospheric tale of a family cursed by lycanthropy.

Sherlock Holmes Faces Death (1943) provided Hobbes the colorful role of Brunton the butler. Alfred Brunton is inclined to sprout verse, has a amusing encounter with Nigel Bruce, and toasts his employers, the Musgrave family, with, "Some were murderers and some worse, but they all knew how to keep a secret—and so do I." The heavy-drinking butler later disappears, but his body turns up in old burial crypt beneath the cellar

A portrait of Halliwell Hobbes as he appeared in New York at the Broadhurst Theatre as Sir Lawrence Wargrave in Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians" (June 1944).

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (Paramount, 1932): Muriel Carew (Rose Hobart) tries to persuade her father Brig. Gen. Sir Danvers Carew (Hobbes) to let her marry Mr. Jekyll (Fredric March).

(actually the old Dracula set). Other mid-forties Hobbes' roles were: Charney in Mr. Muggs Steps Out (1943), a doctor in Forever and a Day (1943), Mr. Muffin in Gaslight (1944), the butler in Casanova Brown (1944), and Soames, Bette Davis' first butler, in Mr. Skeffington (1944). Another horror film appearance for Hobbes came in The Invisible Man's Revenge (1944), in which he played Cleghorn.

Hobbes returned to Broadway, where he was featured in two Agatha Christie-related plays. He had a successful run at the Broadhurst Theatre as Sir Lawrence Wargrave in "Ten Little Indians" (June 1944). (He was not in the screen version, released in 1946 as And Then There Were None.) In September 1946, Hobbes opened at the Plymouth Theatre as Archdeacon Pennyfeather in "Hidden Horizon," based on Christie's Murder on the Nile. The play did not enjoy the success of the earlier Christie adaptation, closing after only 12 performances.

Jacques Tourneur directed Hobbes as Clenchfield in Canyon Passage (1946). He then played the coroner in If Winter Comes (1947), starring Deborah Kerr and Walter Pidgeon. You Gotta Stay Happy (1948) had Hobbes as Martin. He also was seen in The Black Arrow (1948). That Forsyte Woman (1949), based on the works of John Galsworthy and featuring a star-laden cast, included Hobbes as Nicholas Forsyte.

Hobbes, now in his seventies, began shifting his acting pursuits back to the theatre and to the relatively new medium of television. He had a fantasy-related role in "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," the 11/20/50 episode of Arch Oboler's Light's Out on NBC. Also in 1950, Hobbes appeared on TV in "Mary of Scotland" (ABC) and "Victoria Regina," starring Helen Hayes, for Robert Montgomery Presents (NBC).

On stage, Hobbes played Dean Frederick Damon in a revival of "The Male Animal" (May 1952). Hobbes appeared at the ANTA Theatre for only 7 performances as Mr. Touchett in "Portrait of a Lady" (December 1954). He was Perignolies in "Tonight in the Samarkind" (February 1955) and portrayed David Anson, the father of Hume Cronyn's character, in "A Day by the Sea" (September 1955). Back on TV, Hobbes was seen in "The Small Servant" (11/30/55) on NBC's Alcoa Hour. He then toured (Nov.-Dec. 1955) from New Haven to Washington, D.C., as Mr. Metcalf in "A Quiet Place" (starring Tyrone Power), but the play closed prior to reaching Broadway.

Halliwell Hobbes continued to be active in his profession as he approached the age of eighty. He appeared on Studio One (CBS) in "Flower of Pride" (3/12/56). On the Alcoa Hour (NBC), Hobbes was featured in "Mrs. Gilling and the Skyscraper" (6/9/57). His final billed film appearance came as Eli B. Windgate in Miracle in the Rain (1956).

On February 20, 1962, Halliwell Hobbes died in Santa Monica, California, at the age of 84, after suffering a fatal heart attack. He was survived by his wife, Nancie B. Marsland, and son, actor Peter Hobbes.

Halliwell Hobbes epitomizes the legion of steady, talented character actors whose work have been neglected by too many film historians. Hobbes was a technically adept, forceful presence, ever ready to lend a dramatic or comedic touch, in so many films. Along with Eric Blore, he remains the screen's quintessential butler/valet. Horror film fans should pay attention to his fine contributions when films like the Fredric March Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula's Daughter, The Undying Monster, and The Invisible Man's Revenge pop up on TV or in film revival houses.

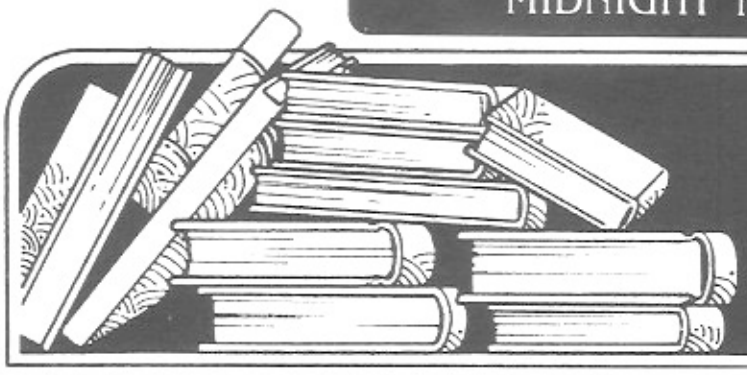
CINEMACABRE VIDEO

THE SNAKE WOMAN starring John McCarthy, Susan Travers, Elsie Wagstaff, and Arnold Marle is the story of a curse placed upon a small English village during the 1890s. A herpetologist working in the bleak moors of Northumberland conducts strange experiments and injects his pregnant wife with snake venom resulting in the birth of a cold-blooded serpent child. After developing the ability to transform herself into a snake, the young woman kills many of the local villagers until Scotland Yard is brought in to solve the case. Produced in England, THE SNAKE WOMAN was directed by Sidney J. Furie who later progressed to bigger-budget films such as THE IPCRESS FILE, THE APPALOOSA, LITTLE FAUSS AND BIG HALSY, LADY SINGS THE BLUES, THE ENTITY, IRON EAGER I and II, plus SUPERMAN IV:THE QUEST FOR PEACE.

Originally released in 1961 on the bottom half of a double bill with DR. BLOOD'S COFFIN, THE SNAKE WOMAN is a film that literally seems to have slithered off the face of the earth--at least as far as movie fans and collectors are concerned. It's never been on television here in the Baltimore/Washington area, it's never been available for rental in 16mm as far as we can determine, and we've never seen a print advertised for sale in any film collector's publication. In addition, THE SNAKE WOMAN has never been available on prerecorded videotape and we've never seen it in the lists or catalogs of any video collector or of any other independent video company.

We stumbled upon a well-used 35mm print almost by accident, and although somewhat splicy at times, the print was in acceptable condition except for incomplete beginning and end titles which we have had professionally restored for our release of this film. Since a video or laser disc release on a major label seems unlikely for most low-budget movies such as this, we think you'll be very pleased with our version of this seldom-seen feature film. Running Time: 66 minutes. Black and White. VHS only. Price: $16.95 on a Scotch EG tape. Please add $2.00 for postage and insurance by 4th class mail or $4.00 for shipping by first class mail and send check or money order to: Cinemacabre Video, P. O. Box 10005, Baltimore, Maryland 21285-0005. No C. O. D.s, please! We regret that we are unable to ship by UPS. Money orders are encouraged since personal checks may delay shipment until payment clears our bank. Maryland residents should enclose an extra 5% sales tax. Thank you very much.

A copy of our catalog featuring rare theatrical trailers, TV shows, short subjects, and feature films will be sent free with every order. If you would like to receive our catalog without purchasing THE SNAKE WOMAN, please send payment of $1.00 which is deductable from your first order.



BOOK REVIEWS

by Gary J. Svehla

GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN: CLASSIC HORROR FILMS VOLUME 4
FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN: CLASSIC HORROR FILMS VOLUME 5
DRACULA: CLASSIC HORROR FILMS VOLUME 13

Edited by Philip J. Riley, each volume approximately 170 pages, full-size paper. Each available from: Magicimage Filmbooks, 740 S. 6th Avenue, Absecon, New Jersey 08201. Price: $19.95 (plus $3.00 shipping).

The Magicimage Filmbook series continues maintaining the consistent level of quality set by earlier entries. By now people who have purchased the earlier volumes know exactly what to expect from publisher Michael D. Stein and company. The strengths of the entire series continue to shine and the flaws, mostly due to economics, are apparent yet not very distracting.

The Ghost of Frankenstein inaugurates Magicimage's exploration of Universal "B" horror classics. The Preface by Lon Chaney, Jr., was compiled from audio tapes recorded for Phil Riley back in 1971; the Foreward follows written by Hans J. Salter, the man who provided the musical score for the film. The Introduction, written by star Ralph Bellamy, completes the trio of short yet information articles written by artists associated with the film written many years after the fact. Such current-day reflections (Chaney, Jr.'s 1971 remembrance is still nostalgic reflection) are here very worth while because of the wonderful stories spun about making 1940s' horror films. As usual Greg Mank's 10-page Production Background becomes the heart of the volume and is filled with wonderful facts specifically about the making of this "B" programmer. Following are pages upon pages of wonderful stills, photos of Salter's music composed for The Ghost of Frankenstein, photos of deleted scenes, etc. The original shooting script, originally titled There Is Always Tomorrow, appears as well as the original motion picture Pressbook. Following, for the first time, is Greg Mank's synopsis of the movie with the justification given that this is the first volume in the series whereby the film is not currently available on video cassette.

The major flaw is the reproduction of the script from an original mimeographed copy that is not easy to always read. True, it is cheaper to reproduce that mimeo copy rather than reset the entire script in nice professional typesetting, but after reading numerous scripts reproduced in earlier volumes in the same way, I now find myself reading less and less of each Magicimage script because of irritating reproduction.

Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man follows directly in the "B" programmer series and comes hot upon the heels of Ghost. Here the Foreward is by screenwriter Curt Siodmak, a brutally honest and entertaining personality who weaves some pretty wonderful tales of working at Universal Studios during the '40s. Reprinted is a fabulous article, "The House That Horror Built," reprinted from a movie fan magazine of the era, detailing star Bela Lugosi's house! As usual Greg Mank's detailed production background ties the entire volume together. A large section of rare movie stills appears, including shots of a plaster impression made of Lon Chaney, Jr.'s face. Of course Curt Siodmak's original shooting script follows, reproduced in the same flawed method mentioned above. The complete motion picture Pressbook comes next. But most interestingly, at the very end appears a personal questionnaire, written in Bela Lugosi's own handwriting, providing biographical information to Cameo Pictures Corporation. Besides offering the usual likes/dislikes, hobbies, favorite books to read, favorite performances, etc. appear some very interesting information. In the space provided to document the "highpoints" of his life broken down by decade, Lugosi scrawls "it is no one's business." Such interesting finds such as this make these Magicimage books so very special and informative.

Dracula, at least one-third thicker than the other two volumes already mentioned (yet selling for the same modest price), becomes perhaps the most handsomely mounted Magicimage volume ever. It certainly is a volume worthy of the original Universal horror classic! The Special Introduction is by Bela Lugosi himself, taken from a written transcript of a radio promotion Lugosi made to promote the '31 classic. The Foreward, by horror film expert Ivan Butler, details the progression of Dracula upon the stage. The Preface is by Carla Laemmle of the famous Universal Studio family and also, along with star David Manners, the only surviving cast member (she has a small part in the coach sequence). The wonderful Production Background is here provided by Philip J. Riley and George Turner (one of the finest experts on film history bar none) and includes comparisons to the long-lost London After Midnight. Also included is Fritz Stephani's original treatment prior to the writing of the screenplay. Also included is Louis Bromfield's first treatment of the screenplay for Dracula to have starred Lon Chaney (before his untimely death). Both Stephani's and Bromfield's treatments differ remarkably from what finally appeared on the screen. The comprehensive Production Background is absolutely definitive and offers much insight into the making of this often discussed film classic. Even a short article well illustrated documents the Spanish language version of Dracula filmed concurrently with the Browning classic. Even an article describing the process of providing a minimal music score for the film appears. Pages of rare stills follow, including some spectacular sequences cut from the final print. The final Script and complete motion picture Pressbook appear in their entirety.

Without doubt, if you can afford only one Magicimage volume, make it Dracula as it is definitely the finest achievement so far in the entertaining series.

While Midnight Marquee has consistently recommended every volume in the series and still does, it is indeed a shame that the volumes could not have been expanded to include both critical reviews of the time of release as well as Greg Mank's (or George Turner's) analyses of each film as seen from a modern perspective. This untapped potential would have surely made each Magicimage volume definitive.

HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC: THE TANGLED WEB OF DRACULA FROM NOVEL TO STAGE TO SCREEN by David J. Skal, 243 pages, full-size cloth. Available from: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10110. Price: $39.95 (plus $3.00 shipping).

It is a rare treat to see such a scholarly and well researched book being offered in such a glossy package: slick dust jacket, thick semi-gloss paper, oodles of rare photo reproductions artistically arrayed amid insightful text. The critical horror film fan would expect this package to be available only from McFarland or Scarecrow Press, but

It all started with Bram Stoker. Here The Lost Boys (by Koszowski) carry on the vampire legacy.

it is encouraging to see a mainstream publisher take a chance on the much maligned horror cinema.

Skal, realizing that Bram Stoker and Dracula have been over-analyzed in critical circles, takes a novel approach. Beginning with the earliest examples of vampire literature, emphasizing both the psychological and sexual orientation of such literature, he focuses on Stoker's Dracula and its aftermath. But the true focus of the volume is upon Stoker's wily widow, Florence Stoker, and how she lived the rest of her life comfortably upon the proceeds from her husband's literary classic.

In minute detail we see how Mrs. Stoker first sells the dramatic rights to stage productions and how the first filmed version of Dracula, Nosferatu, was tangled in a lengthy legal litigation involving copyright infringement. From here we continue moving towards Hollywood's soon-to-be classic motion picture and all the new revelations by Skal documenting the coming-together of the Universal Lugosi classic.

And Skal, along with writer Bill Littman's commentary which appeared in this magazine, offers the best critical analysis of the acclaimed Universal Pictures Spanish language version of Dracula. Even venturing to Cuba (with State Department assistance) to view the complete print (the Library of Congress print is missing reel 3), Skal makes it apparent that footage missing from the American print contains some of the finest moments in the entire film. Having recently viewed a video tape copy of this rare gem, I concur with Skal, joining the legions of Browning-bashers, that the 1931 Universal Spanish version, directed by George Melford, artistically blows the American Browning directed version out of the water. The only superior thing about the American print is Bela Lugosi's performance.

Such an elaborate volume, such wonderful and abundant photos, and such informative text make the Skal volume a must-have for Stoker/Dracula fans everywhere.

ORDER IN THE UNIVERSE: THE FILMS OF JOHN CARPENTER by Robert C. Cumbow. 251 pages, digest-size, cloth. Available from: Scarecrow Press, Inc., P.O. Box 4167, Metuchen, New Jersey 08840. Price: $29.50 (plus $3.00 for shipping).

Boy, do I like this book, but at the same time let me say, it may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Allow me to explain. If you read any one of my articles published in Midnight Marquee it is apparent that I am an English teacher, that my articles are analyses of style, an exposing of the rich levels of meaning to which all valid literature may be exposed. I am not interested in interviews, production details, or other "nuts and bolts" information. I see film as literature so my articles examine film as literature.

This is exactly the approach Robert C. Cumbow takes in his excellent analysis of the films of John Carpenter, for Cumbow sees recurring themes develop through all of Carpenter's work. Each chapter in the book analyzes a different Carpenter film attempting to correlate similarities in style between seemingly divergent Carpenter works. Starting with Carpenter's college career and The Resurrection of Broncho Billy and working his way through his most recent They Live, Cumbow is comprehensive. Cumbow even devotes space to films that Carpenter only wrote (The Eyes of Laura Mars) and extensively covers his made-for-TV movies as well.

To cover so many films the volume, upon initial look, appears to be too skinny. However, Cumbow's style involves careful reading and re-reading to truly understand his depth of thought. No, no, his style is not overly academic and even the casual Carpenter fan will be transfixed by the author's style. Cumbow's style is very simple and direct, yet at the same time it is thought-provoking and deep.

This is the type of book that makes you wish to go out and run all of Carpenter's films back-to-back because Cumbow, like all good critics, makes the audience see things in Carpenter's films that may not have been apparent before. After reading Cumbow, all Carpenter fans owe themselves a treat by seeing the films again with fresh eyes. Again, I loved this volume; this is the type of analysis that truly excites me!

THE GREAT SCIENCE FICTION PICTURES II by James Robert Parish and Michael R. Pitts. 499 pages, digest-size, cloth. Available from: Scarecrow Press, Inc., P.O. Box 4167, Metuchen, New Jersey 08840. Price: $49.50 (plus $3.00 for shipping).

This is another one of those interesting A-Z title listings which contain complete cast and credits, followed by a synopsis and critical reflection by the authors. Nothing original in format here, but the scope and size of the volume is impressive. Hoping to primarily update the original 1977 volume, the authors also went back into the 1930s and 1940s to add titles which they now consider science fiction including the Monogram Lugosi entries (The Corpse Vanishes, Voodoo Man, etc.) as well as earlier classics such as Son of Kong. Science fiction??? A rather broad interpretation of the term!

Obviously, this volume would be most helpful to neophytes to the genre as little new has been added to the stew here. In fact, much of the critical analysis appears reprinted (credited, of course) from other sources: newspapers, Variety, earlier genre books, etc. Thus, writers Parish and Pitts have done a wonderful job of coordinating and compiling data but there is precious little new critical insight to recommend this book to the more devoted, knowledgeable horror/science fiction film fan.

SCIENCE FICTION STARS AND HORROR HEROES: INTERVIEWS WITH ACTORS, DIRECTORS, PRODUCERS, AND WRITERS OF THE 1940s THROUGH 1960s by Tom Weaver. 460 pages digest-size cloth. Available from McFarland & Company, Inc., P.O. Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. Price: $35.00 (plus $3.00 for shipping).

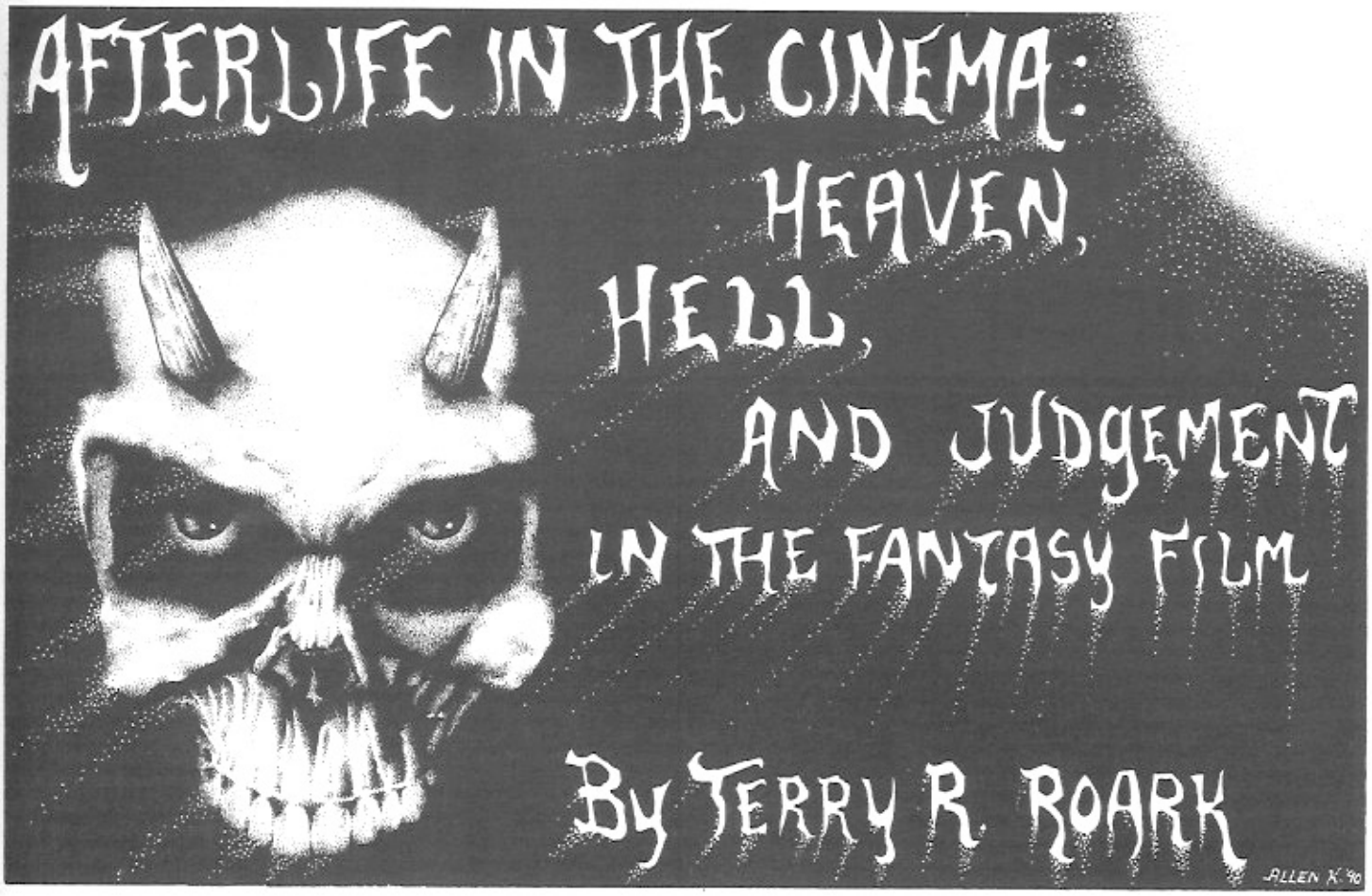
Tom Weaver may be opting for the longest title of any horror/sci-fi genre book, but this sequel to his earlier Interviews With "B" Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers (also available from McFarland for $32.00 postpaid) is simply as terrific as the first volume was.

Simply stated, Tom Weaver is a fan of "B" genre productions from the 1940s through the 1960s, and he has, over the years, spoken with many actors, directors, producers, etc. associated with these films. Most of these interviews have appeared, often in truncated form, in Fangoria or Starlog. But here, collected in one volume, are lavish interviews and filmographies of stars such as Acquanetta, Hazel Court, Kim Hunter, Yvette Vickers, Richard Matheson, Robert Shayne, Robb White, etc. (twenty-eight interviews in all). Many of these personalities are getting up there in years, so this may very well be the last time they will be accorded the opportunity to reflect upon their genre career in detail. And Tom Weaver definitely is enough of a fan and aficionado to ask the most probing, insightful questions necessary to get to the heart of the matter.

For anyone interested in science fiction and horror film personality interviews, this latest Weaver volume (as was the earlier 1988 volume) is a must-have and a thoroughly interesting read. Even if you collect Fangoria and Starlog, maintaining unedited interviews in one impressive volume is the best way to go, as McFarland publications are a class act and made to last.

GORE POSTER SERVICE: Not the rare titles but the cheap ones from the '60s and '70s. Send for our free list. Richard Svehla, 4000 Glenarm Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21206

AFTERLIFE IN THE CINEMA: HEAVEN, HELL, AND JUDGEMENT IN THE FANTASY FILM



"Beneath is all the fiends," wrote Shakespeare. "There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie!"

"There is dreadful hell," confirmed Issac Watts, "and everlasting pains...There sinners must with devils dwell...In darkness, fire and chains."

Milton, more than anyone else, may be largely responsible for the fiendish visions conjured up by the term. In his classic The Divine Comedy, he described hell as a place "beyond the Cape of Hope, in the lowest deep a deeper deep, infinite despair, perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things, abominable, unpitied, unreprieved, ages of hopeless end and infinite wrath."

"Master," wrote the thirteenth century poet Dante, "what gnaws at them so hideously, their lamentations stun the very air?" "They have no hope of death."

Brimstone and fire, endless caverns of red-heated stone, erupting pits of bubbling lava, sweat glistening from tortured bodies racked in pain and anguished souls eternally tormented by grotesque demonic barbarians. (One would be hard-pressed to think of a more graphic cinematic presentation of Satan's 'paradise' than in the 1935 Spencer Tracy classic Dante's Inferno.)

As a child, those images were more than terrifying. Even those of us who were raised in decidedly non-religious families spent many a sleepless night pondering the possibilities. Spared the hellfire preaching of some religious zealot, we got our concepts from other sources, i.e., E.C. comics and the like. E.C. isn't around anymore, of course, but today's fans contend with the continued imagery brought forth by the likes of Hellraiser, Phantasm Parts I and II, the Nightmare on Elm Street series, et al. If anything, the imagery has gotten even more graphic, even more dismal.

Happily, there's a flip side to all of this. It may be discovered within the wonderful realm of the fantasy film, the imagi-movies, those genre offerings which end up all-too-often overlooked by fans who narrow their cinematic experience to specialize only in either horror or science-fiction. Often, these films present more than a mere 'opposing viewpoint' while being undeniably 'message movies.' They present surprisingly profound insights and intelligent alternative philosophies which strangely seem more relevant now than ever before.

The purpose of this article is to examine, at least briefly, several concepts of eternal afterlife as presented by such films. In doing so, it seems appropriate to quote from Shakespeare's Winter's Tale: "It is required you do awake your faith. Then all stand still; On: those that think it is unlawful business I am about, let them depart."

Be further warned: finding the opportunity to view the films about to be mentioned may prove, indeed, a decidedly difficult task. (1) Like most truly worthwhile ventures, however, the discovery will prove well worth the effort. In this writer's eye (who unabashedly admits to being a fantasy film buff), these are undeservedly overlooked classics.

Last time we discussed, in depth, the film Outward Bound and its many remakes. For another likewise notable entry into the afterlife arena, we look now at RKO's Beyond Tomorrow.

Beyond Tomorrow opens in the truest spirit of the proverbial Dicken's yuletide olde England. Indeed, the New York Times review of 1940 was moved to relate "for its first half, it is a latter day Christmas Carol, told with a tenderness and warming as a hot toddy."

Based on a collaboration with Mildred Cram, Adele Comandini went on to write a screenplay for the story of three lonely old codgers: the main character of Michael O'Brian, a Fezziwig-like fun-loving chap; Allan Chadwick, a proper kindly gentleman; and George Melton, a gristled somber business-minded pessimist.

In response to a wager and practical joke played by the three wealthy men to determine the honesty of the average person, down-and-out James Houston and the gracefully innocent Jean Lawrence find themselves unsuspecting 'winners.' The reward, of a splendid Christmas dinner, eventually leads to a lasting friendship which progresses, as the months go by, into an almost family relationship. The charm and wondrous happiness is eventually shattered, however, when the three benefactors die in a plane crash. (As Hemingway was wont to note, all stories, if

continued long enough, end in death and no true story-teller would spare us of that dismal finality.)

But here the fantasy comes in. The three men unexpectedly find themselves returned to their home and it is quite some many moments before the trio discovers that they are, indeed, ghosts. Although they can see and hear, they remain unnoticed by the living. Alarmingly, they find James and Jean, now married and inheritors of the men's home and fortune, have fallen on marital hardtimes. James has succumbed to the seducement of a gold-digger; Jean is facing the subsequent realities of desertion and divorce. And to complicate matters, the gold-digger's spurned, jealous husband has gun in hand and seeks to put an end to his wife's adultery by assassinating her and her new lover.

The dilemma for the ghosts is how they may possibly intervene for the good. Since they are mere transparent spirits, their potential for helping is impossibly handicapped. You guessed it, however—it would not be a true fantasy if some way were not found whereby things end happily.

In the course of accomplishing these ends, however, the story makes some surprising twists. Not only is James not saved by the spirits (he is shot to death by the jealous lover!), but one of our affable ghosts meets an unexpected doom.

In a downright chilling scene, one of the walls of the mansion begins to dissolve in deepening shadow as an ominous welling of foreboding music swells. A voice calls forth from the swirling darkness, "George." (George, you may recall, was the serious, sarcastic member of the trio.)

They are all riveted by the sound, which repeats once more, more ominous, more commanding. George looks up at his lifelong comrades, and then rises slowly to his feet. "It's my time to go," he says so very quietly, and begins walking into the foggy unknown.

Michael desperately tries to plead with him: "George, whatever it is you've done, whatever it is you've said...By God, say you're sorry now—before it's too late!"

To which George pauses in his walk toward the void, turning only so slightly, and states with steeled finality: "In all my life, I've never regretted a single thing I've ever said or did. To say so now would be the height of hypocrisy." With a final breath of resignation, he resumes his walk into the tunneling vortex of darkness, seeming to stretch forever and beyond, until he is finally through...gone from sight, lost forever.

Not a single viewer would have expected one of these three to actually be sent to the abyss. It is a shock so effective and so disarming that this thus-far enjoyable comedy has, within the span of a mere five minutes, transformed itself into a sobering unexpected journey into a netherworld which may prove—how little we contemplate it—may prove to be dangerous. The realization dawns that, logically, if the story of heaven and the hereafter is true, then it must be possible that some of our fears of hell may be valid as well.

What kind of a hell, however? The strange but solidly conventional images as wrought in Disney's The Black Hole? A lake of fire and brimstone? Or, more preferably, the hell as envisioned in Outward Bound, a hell of hope and possibilities from a merciful God who knew and understood our pain?

Beyond Tomorrow goes even further than Outward Bound, becoming liberal enough to incite evangelical cries of blasphemy. Yet, it strikes deeper into the realms of wonder wrought by a loving God than any other work I have ever seen.

To be brief, Michael O'Brian almost loses his only opportunity to inherit his heaven, but is given a reprieve at the last moment. Most pleasantly of all, as Michael begins his walk down that beautiful trail, he sees a solitary figure approaching from the shadows on his left. He pauses as the figure approaches, closer and closer.

"Glory! It is George! George, who was called into the abyss!"

"But how," marvels Michael, "How?"

And George explains his odyssey, how he wandered alone and lost in the dark swirling mists, wandered for what seemed weeks, months, years. And then, quite suddenly, he apprehended the realization that he was to never see his two long time and faithful friends ever again, "and for the first time," he relates, "I began to truly regret of my wrongs."

Together, Michael and George stroll into the light of the great beyond, to a future far brighter than any of them had ever dared hoped or imagined.

(There is an equally profound scene in which the ghost of James, shot with his adulterous lover, Arlene, meets O'Brian, realizes he is dead and then, almost in afterthought, turns about, looking for the ghost of Arlene. She is nowhere to be found.

"Where is she?" he inquires of Michael.

"She is nowhere," Michael explains. "You see, James, she never had a soul..." For the discriminating viewer, it provides more than a bit of food for thought. People without souls? Like the walking dead men Jesus described? Is the Earth populated with empty shells who masquerade as our fellow human beings?

As is often the case with non-recognized classics, Beyond Tomorrow was not well-received upon its original 1940 release. (Well, remember that Citizen Kane and Wizard of Oz were initially financial failures.) In fact, the omnipotent New York Times critics column put it thusly:

"We've never had any particular grudges against ghosts," wrote the critic, "but we're rapidly developing one. ...for when the ghosts come in, the plot usually goes out..." (No doubt this same critic took exception to the miraculous transformation the Three Ghosts of Christmas wrought upon the misery Ebenezer's redemption through Freudian psychoanalysis?) Critics tended to point out the film's deceitful first-half mood of Dickensonian yuletide cheer which was rudely interrupted by the insertion of religious hearsay, "the promise of a hot toddy ultimately proving a ridiculous promise without charm."

The film, however, is an exceptional work of merit, because of the strength of its cast, crew, and writers. Charwick is played by veteran C. Audrey Smith (Prisoner of Zenda, and that great epic Lloyds of London). Hell-bound George Melton is magnificently captured by Harry Carey, Sr., perhaps best known for his four-star performance in Frank Capra's magnificent Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. Young Houston is an early work of now legendary genre star Richard Carlson who starred in such classics as Creature from the Black Lagoon and Bradbury's It Came From Outer Space.

Consider further that director A. Edward Sutherland was no novice to the field of cinema. He had worked with the Keystone Cops, been assistant to Charlie Chaplin, and established a notable reputation as the director of the great W. C. Fields. (A year later, incidentally, he would begin directing Invisible Woman.)

Most significantly of all, however, is the contribution of Producer Lee Garmes. Garmes is little short of a true Hollywood legend; his work is as diverse as working with Bogart in The Desperate Hours to working with Sabu in 1942's translation of Kipling's Jungle Book. His Academy Award winning talent was never more obvious than in his innovative and unique camera work. (It is little known that Garmes, although uncredited with the achievement, is the expert who actually filmed the first third of the legendary Gone With the Wind.) Beyond Tomorrow has obvious touches of his masterstroke ability with the lens, so much so that critics ended proclaiming the movie's "only saving grace a superb lensing supervised by Garmes, one of the world's greatest cinematographers." (And if all that isn't enough, it's one of those rare chances to see the work of Maria Ouspenskaya, the forever-remembered gypsy woman of Lon Chaney, Jr.'s Wolf Man.)

Another film which must be considered when dealing with the topic of death is the excellent On Borrowed Time.

If any hereafter-fantasy can give tie with Field of Dreams as an afterlife masterpiece, it has to be On Borrowed Time. Like Outward Bound, On Borrowed Time is the film adaptation of a noted Broadway play by Paul Osborne, based on Lawrence Edward Walkin's outstanding novel. Accordingly, the emphasis is on a literary mature treatment of a fantastical development, which is especially effective in the dialogue and subsequent development of in-depth characters.

To the credit of On Borrowed Time's outstanding cast, it beats both the previous films in terms of credibility. These people more than seem real—they are real. And naturally following that, we are utterly convinced that what is happening on screen is truly plausible. (It's a rare achievement, indeed, best illustrated by the ability of Jimmy Stewart to convey believability toward the impossible existence of a 6-ft. invisible rabbit known as Harvey. Elwood Dowd's insanity was a beautiful madness we would all happily embrace.)

Two of the screen's finest actors are teamed together in On Borrowed Time: Lionel Barrymore and Sir Cedric Hardwicke. Barrymore, of course, is enscripted in cinema history as the rotten villain Mr. Potter in It's a Wonderful Life, but the totality of his noteworthy screen career would prove a treat for any new-found fan to pursue. By the time Borrowed was filmed, however, Barrymore was so painfully crippled by severe arthritis, he could no longer walk; hence, his many latter film portrayals are either on crutches or in wheelchairs (a la Wonderful Life). Hardwicke maintained that portraying death in the form of Mr. Brink was his favorite film role. After Borrowed, he left the stage and moved to Hollywood where he became more known to genre fans because of his association with Ghost of Frankenstein, Invisible Man Returns, etc.

The story runs familiar with Death Takes a Holiday, but rather renders a pure upbeat mode of fantasy throughout.

Barrymore plays a rather foul-mouthed, though likable, old man unexpectedly faced with the prospect of raising his suddenly orphaned grandson, Pud. (Indeed, the Hayes censorship committee took particular exception to the use of profanity in the original play, and they struck most of the same offending material from the film version, especially the offending dialogue from Pud, given to mimic Gramps through his loving devotion.) All this is to the decided chagrin of spinster Aunt Demmy (a wonderfully wicked performance by Eily Malyon, a character remarkably akin to Oz's Wicked Witch) who is far more interested in Pud's pending inheritance than Pud's actual welfare, and therefore, seeks custody. Gramps is determined to keep Pud safe from her clutches, whilst Auntie goes about attempting to declare Gramps an unfit guardian.

Gramp's chances to remain Pud's guardian are severely hindered when he claims that he has captured death, appearing in the form of a dignified yet sinisterly-somber Mr. Brink. It seems Mr. Brink, after claiming Gramp's wife, goes after Gramps himself only to be tricked into climbing—of all things—a magical apple tree which does Gramps's bidding. (The manner in which we are introduced to this tree is especially fascinating and is of extreme merit in that it is done so with such believability.) Once within its limbs, the tree is ordered to keep Mr. Brink its prisoner. There is a particularly chilling scene in which death attempts to wrestle his way out of its magical bounds, in which large limbs whip eerily about, barely able to contain their prey.

When Gramps lets this news escape, it naturally provides considerable fuel for Auntie's evil intentions, which now call for Gramps's committal on grounds of insanity.

When the family pet dog nonchalantly touches the tree and immediately dies from the contact, Gramps orders a large fence built to protect other stray passerbys from accidental contact. Mr. Brink uses every plea and trick at his disposal to gain release, but all to no avail.

Ultimately, a kindly country doctor and lifelong friend of Gramps, Dr. Evans, stumbles across a startling discovery. None of his terminal patients are dying. Experimenting, he further discovers he cannot so much as kill a single fly.

Nothing can die anymore!

Dr. Evans confronts Gramps with the grisly ramifications of what a deathless world will bring: eternal pain for those who long for death's escape that will never come. Death is the only hope for hundreds of thousands of tormented souls. By continuing to keep Mr. Brink prisoner, Gramps is robbing the terminally ill of the only means they have of ending their personal anguish. Surely, the doctor reasons, nothing so natural, so necessary, and so universal as death should ever have been designed by Providence as an evil to mankind.

Gramps begins to recant, but circumstances bring him about full circle until he is as obstinate as ever, steadfastedly refusing to release death until Pud completes his childhood, safe from Auntie's clutches. Mr. Brinks, however, in an inspiring moment, triumphs by hypnotizing Pud to attempt to

ON BORROWED TIME: Sir Cedric Hardwicke as ghostly death, Mr. Brink, confronts Gramps (Lionel Barrymore).

climb the high fence surrounding the tree of death. Pud falls and breaks his back in the process. Pud is in ceaseless pain, more paralyzed now than Gramps, and all dreams for his future are irrevocably dashed.

Thus, Gramps is left with a terrible dilemma. Death will not compromise on a single point of conviction, yet to release him now would spell finality and doom to both Gramps and the child.

The novelty of Borrowed Time's approach is that Hardwick's portrayal of Mr. Brink never gives us the opportunity to fully examine death's motive. We are suckered in to believing Brink to be the evil entity Gramps claims, yet ultimately we realize that we've done so through our own preconceived notions and never through any actions actually conveyed by Brink himself. Gramps continually refers to death's destination as a place "where to woodbine twineth"—a lovely expression—yet obviously a place of mystery and uncertainty. Hence, the ultimate resolution to the film's plot leads us to a reexamination of our own ingrained philosophical prejudices.

On Borrowed Time is one of the finest fantasy/afterlife films ever offered. (2) Ultimately, its moral is clear: "faith still performs miracles and a good deed finds its just reward." (Bobs Wakins, who played young Pud, is now a minister.)

Angel on my Shoulder is another film of considerable merit. It involves Old Nick, as superbly played by Claude Rains (Phantom of the Opera) who enlists the unsuspecting aide of Paul Muni (3), who is one of the damned souls forever consigned to perpetual labor pitching coal into the vast furnaces of Hades. (The furnaces are necessary, according to Angel, because Old Nick is cursed with a sensation of creeping coldness—he simply cannot get warm enough, no matter how hard he works his deceased dominions to supply more and more heat, and no matter how many additional workers he manages to obtain.)

Rains, however, is intrigued with a plan. One of his old nemeses, a Judge of upright character, is presenting the opportunity for Nick to discredit the lawful career via the substitution of Muni into the suddenly deceased Judge's body. Muni, of course, never suspecting that his benefactor is Satan himself, is eager to accept the plan in return for a guarantee of escape from the torment of Hades.

Once within the Judge's body, however, Muni discovers a new world of people far different than he had ever before encountered during his lifetime of association with criminal types. These people seem genuinely interested in doing the right thing solely for the sake that it is the right thing to do. They are unselfish, and, in the Judge's body, he finds himself, for the first time in his miserable crime-ridden life, loved.

Nick's plans are thwarted when Muni decides that he cannot go through with the idea of discrediting the just and kind legacy of the Judge. The Judge was a better man, and Muni loses his hatred for the man's goodly reputation when he discovered how richly the man deserved same.

Of course, Nick is furious, and failing to either threaten or cajole Muni into complying with the original agreement, promises him a hellish fate more terrible than any imagined nightmare. But there comes a cunning reprieve, wherein Satan is blackmailed by Muni, under threat of revealing how Nick blotched the attempt into being allowed `trustee' status with full privileges.

(In a 1980 television remake, he is outright rescued from Nick's clutches by a heavenly messenger who saves the Muni character and claims him for heaven. It may seem indeed unlikely that one good deed could serve to redeem a hardened gangster/killer from a former life filled with crime and sundry sins, but the message appears to center upon the fact that Muni's previous upbringing never gave him any opportunity to do otherwise, or to know better. It is as if God has shown that, given an upbringing offering the opportunity, Muni would have redeemed himself accordingly. Again, like the unexpected climax of Beyond Tomorrow, it is a second chance, a kind of purgatory frowned upon by contemporary religionists. (4)

There are, of course, a multitude of other fantasies which deal with the subject of the afterlife, not all of which even pause to consider much commentary in the way of judgment. Although it is a given that God Himself makes no mistakes, what may the scenario be if one of his angelic charges messed up? One of the best of these potential possibilities would have to be Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941).

Robert Montgomery plays the part of Joe Pendleton, a pugilist who is up for a chance at the Heavyweight title. Inadvertently, he is involved in an almost certainly fatal plane crash and his squeamish apprentice angel (shades of It's a Wonderful Life's Clarence!) pulls Montgomery, with the best of intentions, from the accident seconds before it's actually taking place, doing so in hopes of mercifully sparing his charge the actual pain of dying so brutally. (The novice angel, Heavenly Messenger 7013, who is assigned to collect souls from "a place called New Jersey," is wonderfully played by Edward Everett Horton, a true cinema legend, undisputedly one of Hollywood's greatest character actors.)

The dilemma arises when Montgomery is escorted by Horton to Claude Rains (trading in his devilish horns from Shoulder for a pair of wings) for the inevitable passage into afterlife. Rains comes to the startling realization that Montgomery would not have died at all but was supposed to survive the crash and live to capture the championship. Initially, it seems a simple matter to replace Montgomery's soul back into his former body but the procedure is severely complicated by the fact that the remains were cremated at burial! Hence, Rains is left with the prospect of finding some suitable soon-to-be-deceased body for Montgomery to take over. That body is found in one Mr. Fransworth, a millionaire who has just been 'murdered' by his wife and her lover, both of whom, needless to say, are speechless when Farnsworth, now inhabited by the soul of Joe Pendleton, emerges uncannily unscathed.

James Gleason, renowned for his comedic talent, probably never gave a better performance than as Max Corkle, Montgomery's boxing manager. When Montgomery `resurfaces' as Farnsworth, his attempts to convince Corkle of his new identity lead to moments of sheer hilarity.

If the plot sounds familiar, it is likely that the reader may have viewed the Warren

ANGEL ON MY SHOULDER: A vision of Hades where the deceased dominions labor harder to provide more heat for Old Nick.

Beatty 1978 remake, Heaven Can Wait. Beatty's version changes a few of the minor details, but holds nicely to the overall atmosphere of the slightly superior original. (The actual title of Heaven Can Wait, incidentally, should not be confused with the 1943 Don Ameche afterlife vehicle of the same name, in which a playboy attempts to convince Lucifer that he is deserving of hell. That 1943 film is always critically referred to with reverence, although for the life of me, I cannot understand why.)

Here Comes Mr. Jordan was a huge success. The New York Times referred to it as "rollicking entertainment; gay, witty, tender, and not a little wise." It was further emphasized (and how especially applicable today) that is was a triumph of character and situations over special effects.

Montgomery was decidedly hesitant to take the lead in Mr. Jordan. Harry Segall, author of the original play "May We Come In?" from which the film was based, was so convinced that it could not work as a film that he abandoned the project entirely. It ended up getting Montgomery an Oscar nomination for Best Actor, as well as being nominated for Best Picture of the Year. Although it lost on both counts, it did take the Oscar for Best Screenplay.

In an attempt to capitalize on Jordan's success, a sequel was made entitled Down To Earth, starring Rita Hayworth as Kitty Pendleton. She portrayed a goddess who descends to Earth to help out a failing Broadway production. (Yes—shudder!—it was a musical.) The only saving grace of the film, however, is to be found in Gleason's reprisal of his Max Corkle role. The movie was an unmitigated disaster, so much so that Columbia head Harry Cohn vowed never to produce another fantasy film. (In a fitting enough epitaph, Down to Earth was remade in 1980 as another unmitigated disaster, Xanadu.)

(Harry Segall is a study complete in himself. Having had the embarrassment of refusing to work with Mr. Jordan, he went on to write the screenplay for Angel On My Shoulder. Segall, as a writer, is almost single-handedly responsible for most of the fantastical afterlife trends of the 1940s.)

To be sure, we've barely scratched the surface of the potential in thought-provoking cinematic afterlife fantasy. Time simply does not permit every afterlife film to be examined here. Rather, it has been the author's intent to concentrate among the more notable and rarest of a few quality gems.

For those daring souls who are open-minded enough to give the imagi-movie a justly deserved whirl, a vast and great treasure await in store.

After all, there are more things between heaven and hell, between sunset and dawn, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

FOOTNOTES:

1. The author wishes to profusely thank Charles and Douglas Park, curators of the Park Achieves, for their graciousness in lending the author these films for viewing.
2. Personally, it was my distinct pleasure to having had the opportunity to portray the pivotal role of the country doctor in a rare recent professional stage production of this long-lost classic (not to mention that it was on the same stage once graced by Harry Houdini, the Marx Brothers, and a host of other long-gone personal heroes), a distinction which will only be surpassed when and if I am given the opportunity to direct the original play "Outward Bound."
3. It must be taken into consideration that Muni's acting style borders on the hammy side. Rather then blame the blatant overacting of Garfield (a la Between Two Worlds), we must remember this was rather the style of the time and must consciously be overlooked as Hollywood's then typical presentation of the common gangster.
4. It is hoped that the author has not offended the religious convictions of any reader. The purpose here has not been to disturb or blaspheme, but rather to enlighten, to encourage, and to provoke thought rather than rote recital of learned dogmatic interpretation. Indeed, such possible scenarios have long been pondered and explored by great Christian theologians and are not at all without scriptural merit. For readers desiring to explore the theological concepts further, they may find considerable insight within the works of C. S. Lewis, specifically The Problem of Pain and The Great Divorce.

EDITORIAL continued from Page 3

issue), but we believe in quality over quantity (and some of the subtlety of the photos has been lost due to small reproduction).

Editorially, we are also stretching creatively. First of all, we are attempting to balance our emphasis on the older films by carrying more articles which highlight not current but more recent genre productions (such as our Tobe Hooper profile this issue). Also, we are expanding our Movie Review section to include reviews of more limited release/direct-to-video releases, highlights of what is available from Independent Video Distributors, and critiques of the more interesting laserdisc releases. In this way MidMar is moving away from only reviewing mainstream Hollywood productions.

We are beginning to introduce a whole new slew of talent to the pages of the magazine. For instance, Steven R. Johnson might remind many readers of former writer Stephen Shutt (remember him from 20 years ago?). Johnson has an esoteric critical style which many may find appealing (and many won't). How our readership responds directly affects what subjects and what writers reappear within these pages. Thus, it is very important to write us and tell us what you like. One letter won't move a mountain, but one of many will (see Grave Diggings this issue to see how reader response does change editorial format.) Thus tell us which writers and features you enjoy the most.

Our art staff has been dwindling in the past year or so. We would like to encourage new artists to become involved with the magazine. Unfortunately, perennial Allen Koszowski has recently turned professional and no longer can do commissioned art for small-press magazines (thus, the art staff and myself have mutually decided that art-drawn title pages for articles have to be eliminated). Koszowski's work will still be appearing regularly in our pages, but his future art will not be tailor-designed for MidMar. Of course David L. Daniels, besides designing our wonderful front covers, will be more actively coordinating his art around features appearing in the current issues (such as his Evelyn Ankers drawing for the Ankers article this issue). And Robert Knox, recovering from set-backs on the job front,

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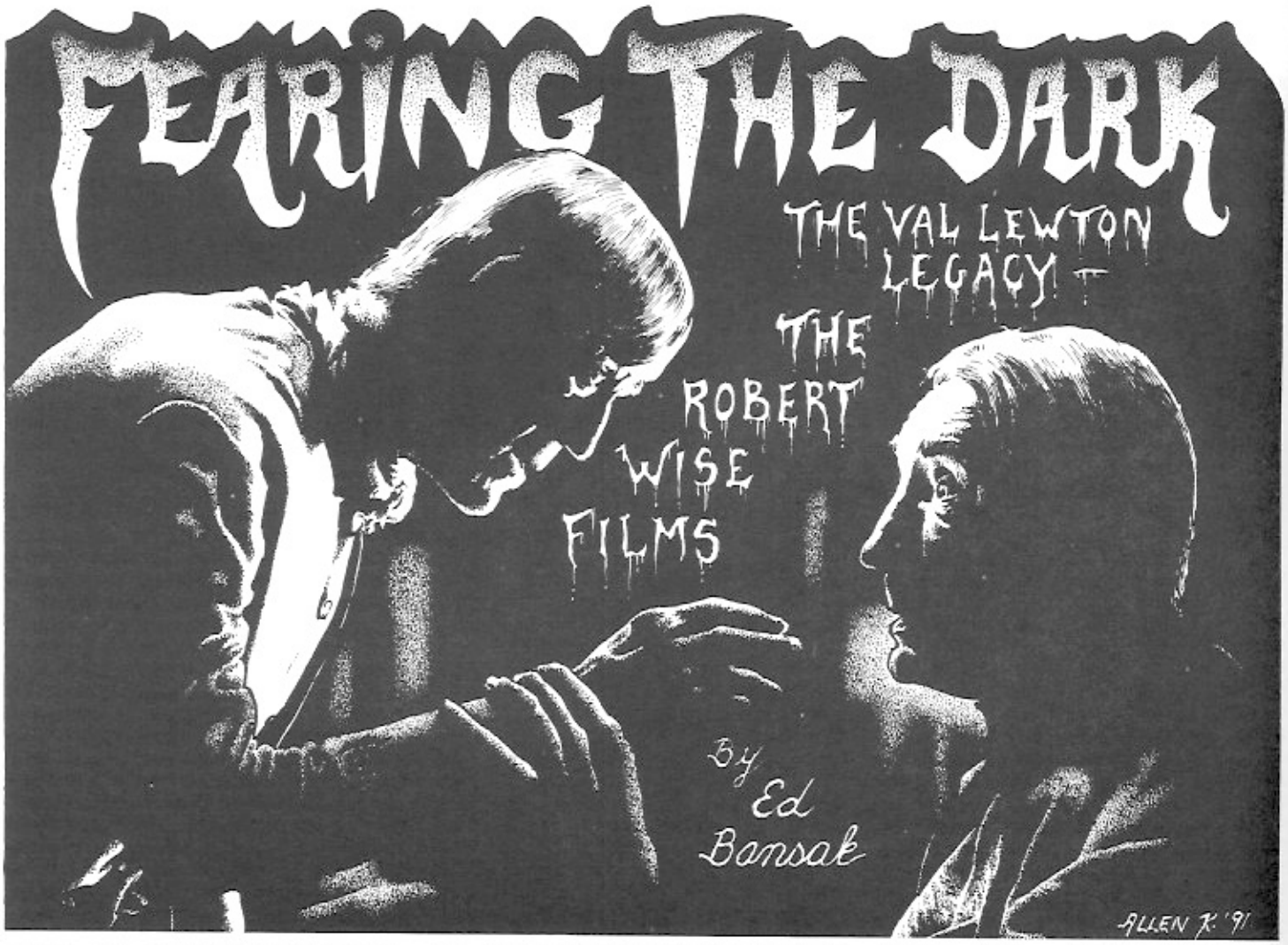


Robert Wise and Mark Robson had much in common, even after their mutual apprenticeship with Welles and Lewton. They had similar strengths, similar weaknesses. Both had been praised for the integrity of their socially conscious "message" films. At other times, by making films to please the crowds, the two directors have been accused of selling out. As directors, Wise and Robson paralleled one another: they each made examples of film noir (Wise—Born to Kill, Robson—Edge of Doom), boxing films (Wise—The Set-Up and Somebody Up There Likes Me, Robson—Champion and The Harder They Fall), war films (Wise—Destination Gobi, Robson—The Bridges at Toko-Ri), films focusing on racial prejudice (Wise—I Want To Live, Robson—Bright Victory), post-Lewton horror (Wise—The Haunting and Audrey Rose, Robson—Daddy's Gone A'Hunting), even disaster films (Wise—The Hindenberg, Robson—Earthquake). The filmmaking origins they shared, the "polar" influences of Welles and Lewton, and artistic integrity vs. creative compromise may have nothing at all to do with their similarly eclectic—and sometimes uneven—directing careers. But it is difficult to believe that such diverse schooling did not lead to ambivalent attitudes concerning their craft and its relationship with the public.

However similar their careers may have been, one thing is certain: out of the three Lewton directors (Tourneur included), Robert Wise was the one to achieve the greatest heights of critical and public acclaim. He was the only one to win an Academy Award for Best Director. In fact, Wise was honored twice in this category (for West Side Story in 1961 and The Sound of Music in 1965, two films also awarded Best Picture). Still, despite the prestige associated with the Oscars, most critics feel the director's best work was during the 1946-1960 period, a stretch of time which followed Wise's Lewton experience, yet preceded his Academy Award triumphs. Success may eliminate the need to prove one's worth, and perhaps "proving one's worth" is the most powerful driving force in all artistic endeavor. It was for Val Lewton.

Wise directed three films for Lewton: The Curse of the Cat People, Mademoiselle Fifi (non-horror), and The Body Snatcher. Of the three, the first and last are among the best films Lewton ever produced.

THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE (1944)

While Mark Robson was engaged in his last two days of shooting for his second film, the ill-fated The Ghost Ship, Lewton had already gone into production for his sixth film, The Curse of the Cat People. The production office, as they had with his first two efforts (Cat People and I Walked With a Zombie, decided to provide the title. Lewton's films, of late, had not brought in box-office returns of the debut films, and the executives in control lent a friendly iron hand to insure success by ordering up a sequel to Cat People. The positive reaction to the finished Curse... must have made executive producer Charles Koerner feel smugly responsible for the raves—and maybe he was responsible in part—but never for the reasons he suspected.

As ironic as it may seem, Lewton often worked hardest for film proposals that bothered him most. Lewton hated to be exploited by his employers, some of his peers believe his emotional response to their interference brought about his early demise. Whether or not his was the case, Lewton was visibly disturbed by the turn of events. After gaining a certain amount of autonomy with the success of the first two films, Lewton could only view this as an insulting step backward in the course of his artistic goals. After spending weeks of agitation in an effort to alter Koerner's shameless tactic of cashing in on an earlier success, Lewton was resolved to being forced to make a sequel.

The Val Lewton reputation was founded upon creativity, despite the fact that he worked within the exploitative designs of "B"-budget horror. I only wish Lewton could have enjoyed his posthumous victory. Look up executive producer Charles Koerner in most of today's film literature and most likely you will see that he is little more than a footnote.

In a way, though, Koerner did foster Lewton's creative process but that is because Lewton's survival gear enabled him to be adept at overcoming handicaps, however pain-

STRANGE, FORBIDDING, THRILLING—
THE CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE
—Slinking into the heart of a little girl who could not see the evil behind smiling lips that could snarl, and feline fingers that could rip young flesh to shreds!
Simone Kent Jane
SIMON • SMITH • RANDOLPH
ANN CARTER • ELIZABETH RUSSELL • EVE MARCH
JULIA DEAN • ERFORD GAGE • SIR LANCELOT
Produced by
VAL LEWTON
Directed by
GUNTHER V. FRITSCH and ROBERT WISE

ful and debilitating they may have been. And Lewton avenged himself by achieving excellence and box-office success in spite of the fact that, outside of giving in on the title, he managed to ignore most of Koerner's intentions and expectations. A major complaint from most critics, when The Curse of the Cat People was released, was that the movie bore a title that didn't fit the work. A little poetic justice for Mr. Koerner to mull over.

Lewton proposed to make a film that was only peripherally related to the first film. By keeping the title, and employing much of the cast of The Cat People, Lewton managed to use the sequel aspect as a cover, in the end creating a movie that was entirely different from its predecessor. The result was a sequel removed from its source: the setting was the country instead of the city, the central focus a young girl instead of a tragic woman, Alice (Jane Randolph) and Oliver (Kent Smith) were now parents instead of workmates, and the character of Irena (Simone Simon) was portrayed to evoke benevolence instead of a mixture of pathos and menace. Lewton only retained elements of the original so long as they suited the purpose of his new story. There is no real "curse" unless we refer to the unpleasant memories of the married couple's past. Other than that, The Curse of the Cat People is an entirely different affair. With an entirely different director.

Because Robson was working on The Ghost Ship and Jacques Tourneur had already left the series, Lewton was forced to search for another director. After writing his own version of the story, Lewton had scriptwriter De Witt Bodeen do some research on Tarrytown, New York (where Lewton had, in fact, spent some of his childhood). Meanwhile, he planned his production. Robert Wise would cut the film, and a newcomer with documentary experience, Gunther Von Fritsch, would be signed on as director. When all was ready, production commenced, this time with a shooting schedule of eighteen days. After a few weeks Fritsch was called off the assignment. The trade papers were curious and RKO answered their queries by announcing that Fritsch had been drafted into the service. But, according to Robert Wise, nothing could be further from the truth. He said that Fritsch had been overly meticulous, at times so unsure of himself that his hesitance resulted in less than half the completed shooting at the end of the 18-day schedule. Lewton, of course, knew he'd be the one to answer to Koerner for the delay. Rather than face further investigation of the hold up, Lewton acted with speed in his reappointments. Gunther Von Fritsch was out and Robert Wise was in. Though the final directing credit is given to both Fritsch and Wise (Fritsch's name, in fact, billed first), the latter was primarily responsible for the finished result. Wise not only finished the film, but reshot several scenes as well. His editing expertise, by working in conjunction with credited editor J. R. Wittridge, added further in making the film Wise's own.

It's hard for me to be objective about The Curse of the Cat People. I've read about the supposed flaws. But, for the most part, I don't agree.

Consider the comments of Lewton expert Joel Siegel:

"...The Curse of the Cat People is not aesthetically one of Lewton's very best productions; it is probably more worth doing than any of the others, but it is not done half so well as I Walked With a Zombie or The Seventh Victim... Too much of the film itself is indifferently executed. There are spots of dead writing in the screenplay, some lifeless performances, over-idealized sets...The direction is plodding and too flat for such a delicate subject...the sets are prettified and bland...the film has an unpleasingly tacky look much of the time."
—Joel E. Siegel from Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror (1973)

Siegel may have his reasons for referring to The Curse of the Cat People as "second-rate Lewton," but, in many respects, I think this film is as good as they get in the Lewton ouevre. I remember viewing it on television as a child and being genuinely moved. I saw this same effect cross the faces of my own children, as well as students to whom I've shown this film. I admit that the movie could have been better if some important scenes were not pulled from the final cut, but apart from this, The Curse of the Cat People is an absolute charmer and nothing less than first-rate Lewton.

The Curse of the Cat People is the only Lewton film to place its primary narrative focus upon a child. In a nutshell, the main plot is deceptively simple. Amy Reed (played by the seven-year old Ann Carter) is a withdrawn, lonely girl whose lapses into fantasy and daydreams provoke the active concern of her parents, Oliver and Alice Reed (Kent Smith and Jane Randolph). These are the same two folks who played an integral part in The Cat People. Oliver, of course, had once been married to Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon), but after her tragic demise in the first film, he remarried and pulled up stakes to relocate in Tarrytown, New York. Yet he has difficulty escaping his past, his daughter being a continual reminder of the things he would like to forget. Despite Oliver's attempts to bring Amy back into the real world, she persists in her fancies, eventually summoning up an imaginary friend (Simone Simon) who happens to go by the name of Irena. Her insistence that her friend is real—and not imaginary—brings about a rift between father and daughter. A state of emergency where Amy's life is threatened finally teaches Dad the lesson he needs to learn and all becomes well with our idyllic Tarrytown family.

But The Curse of the Cat People is much more complex than the above description would lead one to believe. A sub-plot involving the fragmented Farren family adds a chilling resonance to the film, resulting in a cumulative effect that is highly disturbing, despite the apparent happy ending.

The film begins with a vivid, fully realized opening shot. We see a group of small children following their teacher, Miss Callahan (Eve March), down a wooded path. The lighting in this shot, the sun casting its radiance through the webwork of trees, is visually stunning. It is our first taste of one of the more remarkable aspects of this film. Thanks to Nicholas Musuraca, much of the daylit cinematography throughout The Curse of the Cat People is extremely impressive. The same can be said for the more ominous tones achieved during nightscenes, or within the darkened interior of the Farren house. But the intricate clarity and sharpness of the sunlit exteriors are truly

special in this film. They possess a vision that seems rooted in childhood memory; surely we have not lately viewed the natural world with such brilliance as we see here. The closeups of Amy, her blonde hair backlit by the sun, are especially good; you can practically count every hair on her head. Joel Siegel may describe such scenes as "tacky and bland," but I strongly disagree. Even when the exterior scenes are obviously set-bound, they possess a lyrical quality that, for me, completely transcends the nature of their artificial origins.

When the children get to a stone bridge, Miss Callahan informs them that the area is known as Sleepy Hollow (a detail that, later on, figures into the plot) and it is here that they will spend the remainder of their afternoon picnic. A black cat is seen perched in a tree and one of the young boys pretends to shoot it down. This particular shot, which promises to function as some sort of foreshadowing, is embarrassingly superfluous and undoubtedly the result of pressure from the front office as nowhere else in the film (other than the title and a few obligatory references to Irena's feline mania) does a cat have any special significance.

It is interesting to look at the posters for Curse of the Cat People as they achieve new heights in the art of misleading the public. One ad follows the promise of "STRANGE, FORBIDDING, THRILLING..." with a caption which reads, "Slinking into the heart of a little girl who could not see the evil behind smiling lips that could snarl, and feline fingers that could rip young flesh to shreds!" On the same poster we see a ferocious panther slinking around a sultry Simone Simon who, looking like a bare-shouldered feline seductress, wears a strapless dress nowhere seen in the film. Another poster announces, "THE BEAST WOMAN HAUNTS THE NIGHT ANEW!" promising, in smaller print, "STRANGE ADVENTURES IN EVIL...of the beauty who changed into a killer-beast!" Still another shows Irena wearing the appropriate dress featured in the film, but this time she towers over the figures of Oliver and Alice, and sports curved cat-like claws for fingernails. (Strangely enough, none of the ads feature the film's most fearsome visage, that of Barbara Farren, brilliantly played by Elizabeth Russell.) With such an erroneous build up from the RKO publicity department, the film could do little else than disappoint its more bloodthirsty patrons. That the film was able to survive such sideshow misrepresentation was a testament of its poignance and its power.

Oliver expresses his concern that, "Amy has too many fancies and too few friends." It is true that her daydreaming has alienated many of her peers. But Oliver offers little comfort. Throughout the film, he dwells on the memory of Irena and her fanciful notions, believing that her diseased imagination was responsible for fate. For this reason he lacks patience with ideas not firmly bound to reality. Despite his preoccupation with honesty, however, he does his own share of covering up, especially since he has never told his daughter of his previous marriage.

The scene of Amy's birthday party, which soon follows, was based upon an incident from Lewton's own childhood, when he was told that a tree in his yard was really a secret mailbox. In the film, it is party-time and not a single one of Amy's schoolmates have shown up, despite the assurance that the invitations were sent. As her parents remain in their pre-party limbo, we continually cut back to Amy who is shown waiting on the porch, wearing her party dress, looking lonely and disappointed. That Wise could get such an effective, non-stagy performance from a seven-year-old is remarkable. We feel her emotions not because they register on her face in that exaggerated manner we've been accustomed to with the majority of child actors. Instead, she wears her face like a mask devoid of expression, as she picks the leaves from a porch vine, and we read her dejection from within; we know how she must feel as a result of drawing upon our own experience, our own childhood disappointments.

When Oliver discovers that Amy had placed the invitations within a hole in an old tree in their backyard, he doesn't do much to remedy the situation, even though this misinformation (in a whimsical moment, years ago, he invented the myth to amuse Amy) was the direct cause. Nonetheless, the party must go on, even if the only attendees are her parents and Edward (Sir Lancelot), their houseboy. Though Amy seems chipper enough, this is a rather poor substitute for a birthday party. Receiving mixed messages on the fantasy vs. reality issue, Amy is asked to make a birthday wish and blow out the candles. Her wish is to be a "good girl," the kind who will please her father.

It is not uncommon to consider Kent Smith's performance an annoying one. It is true that, in this film especially, he comes across as a creep. But I believe he is playing the role as written. He is so insensitive to his daughter's needs that we lose patience with his role and we are tempted to take our frustrations out upon the actor who plays it. Kent Smith may not be an actor of incredible depth, but "incredible depth" hardly applies to the character of Oliver Reed. Oliver is stodgy, unimaginative, and callow, and Smith's rather stoic performance seems convincingly appropriate. It seems doubtful, even at the film's conclusion, that Lewton intended the audience to feel any great affection for the character.

Though the story of the Reed family may

CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE: Alice (Jane Randolph) and husband Oliver (Kent Smith) clutch each other under the ghostly presence of Irena (Simone Simon) in this studio PR shot.

seem to end happily, our optimism will be held in check by the network of events introduced in a sub-plot concerning another family, the Farrens.

After being ditched by her friends (who think they have been snubbed as a result of the unmailed invitations), Amy finds herself in front of the Farren house, an elaborate mansion occupied by two reclusive women reputed to be witches. The house's exterior would meet the demands of the most jaded of horror fans. The darkly sumptuous decor within would also not be apt to disappoint. If the dwelling looks familiar, that's because RKO execs were trying to recoup their losses after the filmed fiasco, Orson Welles' The Magnificent Ambersons, for which the mansion was built. The interior (take note of the impressive staircase) was also used the year before for the private girls' school in Mark Robson's The Seventh Victim. It would not surprise me if said house played an influence upon Alfred Hitchcock when he—some 25 years later—sought a design for the Bates house in Psycho. Something we see within the house, which I'll get around to later, further confirms my suspicions.

As Amy stands looking at the house, the voice of an old woman (Julia Dean) from a second story window beckons her: "Little girl! Little girl! Come into the garden." Walking past the griffin-like gargoyles that guard the front door, Amy obeys the command and watches a white handkerchief descend from the window. She picks it up and discovers a ring tied to one of its corners, only to be jolted by the appearance of another woman (Elizabeth Russell), younger but infinitely more menacing, who pulls the handkerchief (sans ring) from Amy's grasp. She is understandably intimidated; if looks could kill, the young girl would be dead and buried. It is difficult to describe the chilling presence of Elizabeth Russell in this film.

When Amy attempts to report the incident to her father, Oliver has the first words, revealing the wonderful ship model he built just for her. (More perceptive viewers may get the impression that a boat model does not necessarily top the list of most little girls' desires.) When Amy explains about the kids shunning her, Oliver is not the fount of sympathy: "I shouldn't be surprised. I couldn't blame them." As if it were entirely Amy's fault that they did not receive the invitations. One wonders why Oliver hadn't taken the responsibility of calling the children's homes, offering apology and explanation. (Some parents would have set another party date, but I suppose Ollie was too busy with his model building.) Adding injury to insult, when Amy explains about the old lady and the ring, Oliver sharply accuses her of making the story up, saying that reporting such fantasies is nothing short of lying. As mentioned above, Oliver's character is not an endearing one.

Having had enough of her father for the time being (and who can blame her), Amy goes out to play in the back yard, an obvious—albeit extremely stylish—set. Desperate for some manner of attention, she rubs her "magic" ring and wishes for a friend. Leaves, descending like large snowflakes, fall from trees and the lighting shifts as if overhead clouds were moving above, blocking the sun's rays. Amy's face suddenly brightens (as does the lighting of the set) and, though we are not yet privileged to see what Amy sees, it is clear that her wish has been granted.

Shortly thereafter, when Amy shows her ring to her mother, she gets the typical parental reaction: "Darling, you shouldn't accept gifts from a stranger." But here's a switch: she is told she must return it. Bad enough she should consort with strangers once, but to request a reunion seems a misguided bit of advice to me.

Amy goes to the Farren house, providing us with the kind of eerie scene we have come to expect in a Lewton film. The door is opened by Barbara Farren (Elizabeth Russell). Amy explains her mission and seeks an audience with the kind old lady who threw the ring down from the window. Disquieting thoughts register in Amy's eyes as she watches Barbara slowly glide down the stairs to a lower level, her face lit from below, her gaze fixed upon Amy as she does. Amy anxiously bides her time, finally making her way into another room where she is stunned by an array of animal trophies, immortalized by the wonders of taxidermy (another possible Psycho reference). We see a particularly grotesque bit of work, one which causes a mental double-take: a menacingly large cat holding a hopelessly mangled bird in its mouth. Amy backs away, only to be startled further as the pages of an open book riffle from a draft. Whether it be intentional or not, Jacques Tourneur would direct a scene in Curse of the Demon that will echo the ambiance we see here—(stuffed cat and open book included).

The atmosphere is perfect for a Lewton "bus" and we get it with startling laughter and a sudden burst of light: the petrified Amy makes an abrupt turn and we see the old lady who has just thrown open the drapes. It is Julia Farren, a retired actress of the theater. With the opening of the drapes, the atmosphere of the room has taken a comforting turn. So has the old woman, who is disarmingly friendly to Amy. Juila Farren is decked out in an elaborate attire—evening dress, pearls, jewelry—which matches the interior decor of her home. One wonders why her appearance is so formal, given her reclusive nature. But by the end of the scene we realize that, unlike Oliver, Julia cherishes her memories of the past, taking solace in them; she has been spending her final years reliving the glories of her stage career, and the manner in which she is dressed is a reflection of this. When Amy explains her visit, Julia refuses to accept the ring; it is a gift and Amy must keep it. As Julia reminisces about her stage experience, we see Barbara standing in the adjoining threshold staring at them in that icy manner of hers. To Amy, Julia whispers: "She's always spying on me. That woman is an imposter, a liar, and a cheat."

Eventually, Edward appears to escort Amy back home, but she persuades him to let her stay for a story Julia is about to tell and the old woman begins her abbreviated tale of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Some incidental music accompanies the tale, along with the addition of hoofbeats, making Julia's rendition of the story an effectively chilling one. Amy looks scared, and we can't blame her, especially when Julia moves closer and her face reflects light from below, coming across like the old flashlight-under-the-chin trick. At this point, Amy seems quite content to make a quick exit. Barbara

CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE: Amy goes out to her snow-laden backyard and finds Irena wearing a hooded cloak. There is great warmth in the scene as Amy delivers her special present.

later confronts her mother on the matter of being called "a liar and a cheat" in front of Amy. Julia responds: "My daughter, Barbara, died when she was 6," which is, of course, Amy's age.

This leads us to speculate upon one of Lewton's unrealized intentions. In its present form, The Curse of the Cat People seems to show little connection between the major plot (involving Amy and Oliver) and the subplot (involving Barbara and Julia). While watching the film, the relationship is, at best, unclear. Only after thinking it over a bit, can we begin to see a pattern of similarity here. But this was not the way the film was originally conceived. According to Joel Siegel, "The screenplay was altered: one scene, in particular, had Julia Farren quoting lines from King Lear which fuse the main plot and subplot into a single theme—the problem of parents 'knowing' their children. With these Lear lines missing, the plots don't 'rhyme' and the Farren sequences seem rather arbitrary..."

That night, while Amy is sleeping in her bed, the dark room scattered with moonlight, we hear a haunting voice-over from Julia who is repeating her story. We once again hear the galloping hooves and a shadow, presumably from a passing vehicle, washes over the child who wakes, screaming, from her nightmare. She realizes she has only experienced a dream, but is unnerved by the dark memories left in its wake. She is in need of comfort and, rather than seek the help of her father, the person least sympathetic to her flights of fancy, Amy gives a beckoning call to her imaginary friend, a figure not yet seen by the audience. We see a shadow and hear a soothing female voice. All is well, for the time being.

The next morning, Amy finds a photograph of Irena hidden in a drawer. This leads her, if we take the film as a psychological study, to select a face for her imaginary friend.

Amy is shown playing in the back yard. She throws a ball and it bounces out of the frame. When it returns, it is in the hands of Irena who walks into our view dressed in a medieval gown. Though her attire seems laughable to some (and tackily erotic to others), an earlier shot that never made the release print involved Amy looking at an illustration from "Sleeping Beauty" and seeing the gown in question being worn by the princess. Pursuing a bit of psychological realism, the illustration of the gown, coupled with the discovery of Irena's picture, could account for the image of Amy's imaginative friend taking such a form.

The film builds the relationship between Amy and Irena in many scenes over the passage of time. It is obvious that the bond has grown between them. In one scene, Irena helps Amy to learn her numbers; in another, Amy introduces her array of dolls to Irena. It should be noted that Irena's benevolence is well-established, despite the dark persona that was in evidence in her portrayal of Irena in Cat People. Indeed, aside from her accent, she could be a different character entirely. Even when Irena, asked of her origins, says such cryptic things as, "I come from great darkness and deep peace," we never

CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE: Disquieting thoughts register in both Amy's and Julia Farren's eyes, two females haunted by secrets of the past.

doubt the warmth she exudes for the emotionally needy Amy, who is bid to never tell a soul about her playmate. A series of dissolves show the passage of time, and soon it is Christmas Eve.

Amy has a number of presents for family and acquaintances, including a twenty-five cent ring for Julia Farren, and a mysterious gift whose recipient she will not reveal. Later, Amy goes out to her snow-laden backyard and finds Irena wearing a hooded cloak. There is great warmth in this scene as Amy proceeds to give the mystery present to her friend. It is a falling star pin, which Irena immediately attaches to her cloak, saying she will treasure it always. When Irena offers her own Christmas gift to Amy, it is presumably the beauty of nature. The set undergoes a change of lighting and the trees and bushes begin to sparkle, transforming the scene into a virtual winter wonderland. Despite the noble intentions, this nebulous gift is a bit of a letdown. We keep waiting for something more, wondering if we're going to get it, when Amy is interrupted by her mother's call and must return to the house.

When Amy and Edward visit the Farren house to give Julia her ring, there is a large unopened present in the foreground. Julia is overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of the child: "It's been so long since I've had a Christmas present." When Amy points out the large one that remains unopened, Julia answers, "Oh, that's from her. That woman." When the old woman opens Amy's present and sees the two-bit ring, she is a model of enthusiasm: "My dear child! You've made my Christmas such a happy one! What could I do with a ring from the King of Spain"—she takes this off her hand and flings it over her shoulder into a metal ashtray, replacing it with Amy's ring. It's a heartwarming moment, as patronizing as it may be, and, ironically, such benevolence from Julia is a set-up for the horror to come. Julia's throwaway emotion to a virtual stranger makes Barbara seethe with jealousy. The pathos Elizabeth Russell is able to get from the character of Barbara Farren is extraordinary. Our loyalties instantly shift when Amy leaves and Barbara, heretofore pegged as the malevolent one, suddenly steals the most sympathy we have felt since Amy's birthday invitations made it as far as the backyard. Barbara's unopened gift saddens us and we see ourselves in her deepest feelings of rejection: "You haven't even opened my present." Without altering any facial expression besides the look in her eyes, Russell captures our hearts and turns our sentiments over like an hourglass. Now Julia's nothing more than a callous old fool, hideously transformed as a result of the cruel treatment she has given to her daughter for more years than anyone wishes to count. Clearly, Barbara qualifies as the quintessential Lewton "victim," despite her menacing presence. The ambivalence we suddenly feel toward both Farren women is, at this point, very disturbing.

It is curious that the links between Amy and Barbara remain so elusive in the finished form of this film. Both characters suffer from the frustration of the same inner need (parental acceptance), a problem which begins, in each case, at the age of 6, and both characters clearly occupy worlds of alienation and isolation. With an insightful comment, J. P. Telotte (from his Lewton book, Dreams of Darkness) gives us further parallel: "Viewed against the pattern of their offspring, parents like Oliver and Julia indeed seem quite childish, as petulant, irrational, and given to play as any

CURSE OF THE CAT PEOPLE: Tragic figure Barbara Farren (Elizabeth Russell), alone on the stairs with her dead mother, is about to simply walk out of the picture.

youngsters." (Consider Julia's playacting and Oliver's model-building.) We also associate the lonely worlds of Amy and Barbara with Irena Dubrovna's isolation (in both films) and such association will add an immeasurable degree of poignancy to the film's climactic moment.

Later, when Amy sees a mislaid photograph of Irena and says, "Daddy, you know my friend, too!" poor Oliver reacts as if he's been tossed a hornets' nest and tells his daughter it just isn't possible. Her insistence leads him to take her out in the backyard to prove there is no such "friend." Amy sees Irena and, though her playmate puts a finger to her lips in a gesture of secrecy, the young girl admits her friend is indeed occupying her usual place. The incredulous Oliver, who never even looks in Irena's direction (not that we'd expect the dolt to see her), is outraged by his daughter's "lying" and the girl is banished to her room.

When we cut to Amy's bedroom, we soon find Irena making an appearance. The spectral playmate, aware of the disharmony she has caused between the young girl and her father, announces that she must leave Amy's life. To director Wise's credit, Irena does not fade and vanish, courtesy of superimposed special effects, but rather disappears by a kind of cinematic sleight-of-hand, a spatial illusion created by a moving camera and the back of a chair blocking the foreground. This alternative to flamboyant trickery is refreshingly resourceful.

Amy manages to sneak out of the house. Donning her coat, she makes her way to the backyard, but Irena, despite Amy's beckoning calls, is not to be found. The young girl continues her pursuit, moving through the snowy yard to an opening in the fence and beyond. There is a storm approaching.

When the repentant Oliver goes upstairs to console his daughter and finds an empty room, he becomes frantic. The house is alerted and a call to the police is made. The situation, compounded by the approaching storm, causes great anxiety for all concerned. Oliver and Alice discover Amy's footsteps in the snow and begin to follow them. Enroute, Oliver swears that he will believe whatever Amy says from now on, if he finds her.

Such a turnabout in his attitude is difficult to swallow, even if Oliver received expert assistance in understanding the trials and tribulations of childhood, courtesy of Amy's teacher, Miss Callahan. The latter's continual presence in the Reed household seems without real purpose, merely a contrivance to move the plot. Honestly, she is so frequently at the house, one wonders about her motives. She turns up often enough that we may be inclined to think she's either a boarder or Oliver's mistress.

Cutting back to Amy, we see her treading her way through snowdrifted paths and onto the ominous backroads of Tarrytown, and we realize she is in the process of taking a Lewton "walk." Unlike the quintessential Lewton "walks," (Alice's journey through Central Park in Cat People, Betsy's travels through the sugar cane fields in I Walked With a Zombie, Teresa's mission for flour in The Leopard Man, or Jacqueline's escape from the Pallidists in The Seventh Victim), Amy's "walk" in Curse of the Cat People will possess neither the longevity nor the almost palpable air of menace found in its predecessors. Yet, despite its brevity, this "walk" becomes a memorable one because it plays upon childhood fears: the anxieties of running away from home, becoming lost in a snowstorm, falling victim to memories of ghostly tales, escaping the pursuit of baying hounds. So threatening are the conditions of her "walk" that refuge in the Farren "witchhouse" becomes a more comforting alternative. However, unlike the typical Lewton "walks" mentioned above, it is not the journey but the destination that offers the only real threat to Amy's well-being. There is undeniable suspense created by our uncertainty of Amy's fate. For most of the film, the cards are stacked against Amy. Like the young girl, Teresa, in The Leopard Man, it is quite conceivable that she may be a Lewton "victim." Nowhere does she possess the kind of resourcefulness we have come to expect from typical Lewton "survivors," the plucky heroines of Cat People, I Walked With a Zombie, The Seventh Victim, Isle of the Dead, or Bedlam. We have genuine reason to worry.

When, along in her journey, Amy comes to the bridge shown at the film's opening, she remembers "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." Her fears are increased by her imagination as she begins to cross it and, courtesy of a voiceover, she hears Julia recount the tale of the headless horseman. Soon Julia's voice is accompanied by the galloping of a horse. Not quite all the way across, Amy becomes petrified by the hoofbeats and kneels down against the stonewall that flanks the bridge. The camera moves in on Amy's horrified face as the volume of the hoofbeats increases, a cloaklike shadow passes over her as she is about to scream. And then Lewton and Wise pull the rug out from under the impending terror. The passing form is that of an automobile and—we see it now—the hooflike sounds come from loose tirechains repeatedly hitting the car fender. After the "bus," Amy gets up and continues her aimless wandering until, finally growing tired from her efforts in the deepening snow, she sits down against a snowdrift.

Cut to the Farren house. "I hate this storm," says Barbara.

"It was on a night like this that Barbara died," Julia remarks.

"Look at me!" says Barbara with insistence. "I'm Barbara. I'm your daughter. You lost your memory in the accident. Can't you see that I'm your daughter?"

"You're just a poor lost woman. You're not my Barbara."

The eyes of the wounded Barbara take on a cold glaze. "You're always worse after that little girl is here. If she comes here again, I'll kill her...Yes, I'll kill her!" And we know this is no figure of speech. This lady means what she says.

Amy, her sleeping form covered with snow, is awakened by the sound of barking dogs. By this time, the police are involved in the search. But Amy doesn't know this. All she hears are the hounds. She hurriedly gets up and continues toward the only possible shelter within her reach: the Farren house.

Amy pounds the door until Mrs. Farren, cane in hand, hobbles over to let her in. Julia remembers Barbara's threatening remarks, wondering what she can do to protect this child. She resolves to hide Amy upstairs, in a little room under the eaves. As they begin their climb up the staircase, the old woman's weakened heart is aggravated by the excitement. Halfway up the stairs, Julia

is forced to sit down. She cries in despair as she realizes the pains she feels are her final ones. Suddenly she is silent, forever silent. The realization of death registers and Amy looks about in desperation. She glances over the banister, looking down the stairwell that leads to the room below. In the stairwell she sees some curtains shift in the wind. She looks again about the room in a fruitless search for what to do. Another glance down the adjoining stairwell, the curtains continuing their wind-driven dance...and then...a shadow, coming up the stairwell. In what must be the film's most chilling moment, we see Barbara's face—in a bizarre shot via Amy's perspective—move into view within the stairwell.

Barbara ascends the stairs and stands at the bottom of the flight occupied by Amy and the late Julia. Barbara looks at her mother and tears well in her eyes. But as our hearts move in sympathy with Barbara's loss, we are also reminded of the danger that awaits Amy. Though the tears remain in her eyes, the face of Barbara again takes on fearful dimensions: "Even my mother's last moments you've stolen from me. Come here." Quite understandably, Amy hesitates. "Come here, I said!" louder now.

Barbara, the front door open behind her, remains at the foot of the stairs casting her unsympathetic gaze at the little girl. "My friend," beckons Amy with the desperate hope that Irena will come to her rescue. Amy looks at Barbara and repeats her beckoning call. And then quite unexpectedly (for her and for us) Barbara begins a slow transformation; she is changing. Via superimposition, the figure of Barbara finally dissolves to be replaced by glowingly benevolent Irena. Amy's face brightens and she smiles. "My friend," she says again, only this time with warm recognition. But the audience sees Barbara, not Irena. Despite her momentary look of puzzlement, Barbara's threatening stare returns. Amy gets up and rushes down the stairs to hug her friend but she is only hugging Barbara, who, though taken off-guard by Amy's sudden warmth, has apparently not altered her murderous intentions. A close shot of the back of Amy's head reveals her beautiful flowing hair. Barbara's stiff, clutching fingers come from both sides of the frame as the hands squeeze her tresses, getting closer to Amy's neck. We get another shot of the two of them and the suspense is maddening. Amy hugs even tighter, "My friend, you've come back to me. Thank you, thank you."

Another closeup of Barbara's hands, straining, frozen with indecision. Try as they might, they just aren't up to the task of murder, especially now. The warmth and affection of the child, so freely and unconditionally given to the tragic Barbara—unintended as it may be—has quelled her anger. And her hate. In another shot we see Barbara's arms fall to Amy's back where they move to return the embrace. Barbara stares ahead, the tears still trapped within her eyes.

(Note: Ms. Russell recently revealed to FANEX 4 participants that her hands were never used for any of these shots.)

Lucky for Barbara that she has had this change of heart for the search party makes its sudden arrival. Oliver rushes to Amy's side and Barbara walks off into the interior of the house, never to be seen again.

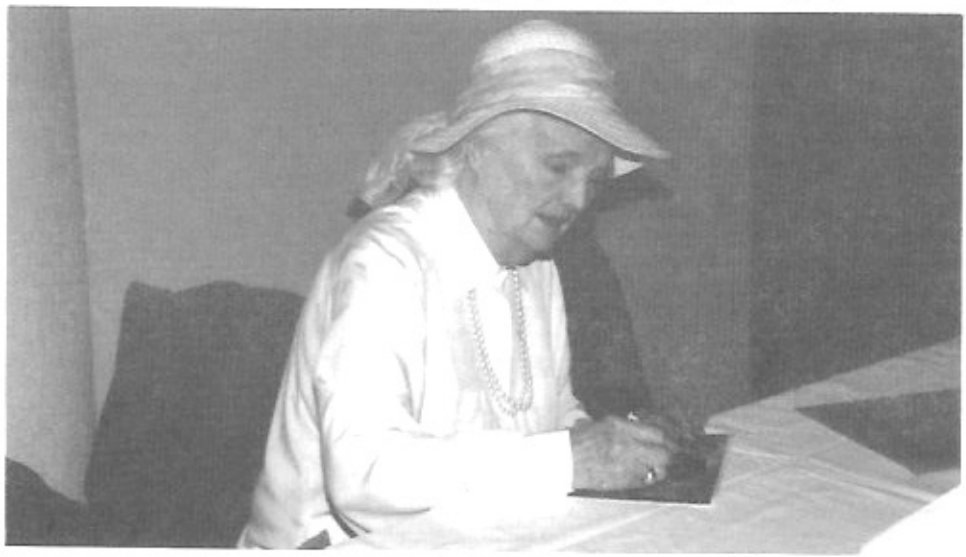
And all is well. Or is it? The police find Julia's body and inform headquarters. Amy goes home with her father and both go into the back yard. "Is she in the yard now?" Oliver asks, looking at Amy. "Yes," answers Amy. "I see her, too," Oliver answers, though he never turns his head to look in Irena's direction. The pat, happy ending, it would seem. Except it really isn't.

The Curse of the Cat People does end with a bit of forced optimism, but the underlying currents of the story continue their disturbing course. Is everything as resolved as Oliver would have us believe? That is open to debate, especially when we consider the last five minutes of the film. Does Oliver really see eye-to-eye with Amy? In the closing scene when Oliver admits to seeing Irena, we get the impression that he is merely humoring Amy. After all, he never bothers to really look. We never expected him to see Irena, but his unwillingness to look in her direction says something about the man. I had glossed over this little detail, about Oliver "not looking," until my children pointed it out, saying it really annoyed them. Considering the theme of the film, I realized that my children's points of view carried some authority. Obviously, Oliver has made up his mind on the answer before he has been asked the question. It is also important to see that this attitude has its parallel in Cat People where Oliver dismisses Irena's fear about herself as claptrap, never giving any of her worries so much as an iota of credence. It is ironic that, in The Curse of the Cat People, Oliver refuses to "see" Irena when he, more than any other character, is the only one truly haunted by her ghost.

Finally, there is the matter of Barbara to consider. At least there is the possibility that things will turn out well for Amy. But Barbara Farren remains The Curse of the Cat People's most tragic figure, Lewton's ultimate "victim." When the "cavalry" arrives to save Amy, Barbara just walks out of the picture. What does the future hold for her? And how can we dismiss her fate when the curtain closes? The one scrap of affection that entered her life by virtue of Amy's hallucination wasn't even meant for her. But so starved for love was this woman that she took whatever she could get. We get no indication that Amy will ever return to the Farren house to comfort Barbara. Barbara Farren will remain a recluse until the day she dies. And the final, most chilling, suspicion is that such a day will come soon.

Ed Bansak's Val Lewton analysis, because of the unusual length of this third section, will conclude next issue.

ELIZABETH RUSSELL, star of Val Lewton 1940's horror classics, as she appeared at FANEX 4, August, 1990, signing autographs.



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by Gary J. Svehla

MIDMAR MOVIE RATINGS:
4.0=Excellent, 3.0=Good,
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MAINSTREAM RELEASE

STEPHEN KING'S IT: 3.0

A four-hour horror film mini-series...answering the creative question of how filmmakers translate literature to the screen in 120 minutes or less.

Lawrence Cohen's screenplay, aided by Tommy Lee Wallace's (a protege of John Carpenter's, Wallace directed Halloween 3: Season of the Witch and Amityville II: The Possession) direction, has produced two-thirds a great horror movie.

I feel that the first night of the mini-series, the first two hours, was horror cinema of the finest order. The characters of the children were finely crafted by all the youthful actors, and the framing story, involving telephone notification of all these children thirty-years later, was splendidly plotted. Tim Curry's performance as Pennywise the Clown was classic horror villainy in the way that transcends pretenders like Freddy Krueger or Jason.

And while Tommy Lee Wallace could not get away with the extreme violence on primetime television as he could theatrically, he was forced to rely on atmospheric horror by creating something emotionally and psychically frightening. And sitting alone home watching the series, I was emotionally involved for the first two hours. Several sequences had me terrified...something rare for modern horror films. The climatic sequence underground in the sewers, the monstrous entity being seen as a shimmering light, was creatively conceived and executed.

But that second night almost ruined a modern classic. The adult actors never quite made us believe their characters as well as the children did...and now instead of subtlety we get giant spider monsters at the conclusion. Tommy Lee Wallace should have understood that by suggesting horror (as was done the first night) instead of showing it (As a "special effect") would have been all the more terrifying and effective. But I suspect that "executives" told him to visualize the horrors at the end.

Comparing Part I of It to the concluding Part II becomes the best case study to illustrate exactly what is wrong with today's horror movies. Give me even the incomplete first half and you have a horror gem. Too bad things had to be compromised so in the second half. Still, flaws and all, It is one of the best terror-evoking vehicles to hit the screen (cathode ray or otherwise) in quite some time. It was simply wonderful and I hope more of this old-fashioned type of horror cinema is coming. Judging by the reactions of the high school students in my classes who saw the show, it was a big hit. Producers, directors, writers, studio executives: take note!

EDWARD SCISSORHANDS: 3.5

After delivering the bloated Batman and becoming a media superstar, Tim Burton, I am happy to report, followed up his media mega-hit with a wondrous, satisfying personal little picture, definitely his finest work to date.

Disguised as a wonderful fairy-tale, Edward Scissorhands is actually a morbid allegory of our times (and actually, as I think even more about this profound movie, of all times) detailing the wretched state of "the artist" in (specifically) our suburban American culture.

While Edward never becomes a fully-developed character, his miming and sensitive performance is marvelously delivered by Johnny Depp. In fact, the performance ages well, becoming richer and more satisfying in retrospect. But with all allegorical characters, Edward must remain a broad, larger-than-life stereotype. Simple requirements of the genre.

To bring it all back home, Edward Scissorhands is a parable about the misunderstanding and mistreatment of the artist, the true eccentric, who never quite fits into the mainstream society.

Created in the mythical mad-lab of his creator by perfect icon Vincent Price (a small yet perfectly effective performance), the creator dies before finishing his work: giving Edward human hands instead of the aggressively angled shears which serve as his hands. Living alone and content in his castle home, Edward uses his imperfection (his scissorhands) to create great, beautiful works of art: sculptured figures created from well-groomed hedges, brushes, and trees.

Soon invaded, captured, and forcefully hauled off to American Suburbia (here a John Water-esque gaudy, color-coded array of cookie cutter houses and quaintly paved streets where everyone leaves for work at exactly the same, precise moment) where he is to live with Diane Weist's family.

Sensitive and quiet, happy to be left alone to work marvels by sculpting hair as well as hedges, Edward is "socialized" and forced to wear middle-class acceptable clothes as well as act in a socially acceptable manner (he is introduced to the neighborhood during a block-party cookout).

Soon falling in love with his teenage princess (an understated Winona Ryder) who is sensitive enough to understand and love him yet never secure enough to reject obnoxious social trappings to truly commit to him (for she truly is the ever-popular high school queen where popularity and peer acceptance mean more to her than love).

Having a kind self-sacrificing heart (he quietly accepts blame for breaking into a home to steal a coveted state-of-the-art audio/visual home theater system) and a naive sense of trust (like many artists, he is exploited, used, and then abandoned before he truly understands what is happening to him), Edward, at first the love of the phoney, artificial people who populate Suburbia, soon becomes the feared, violent fiend. In parody of Universal pictures, the neighborhood pathetics form a mob threatening to once again destroy what they do not understand. Finally being forced to kill the obnoxious former boy friend of Ryder in self-defense, Edward is safely delivered back to his castle home and abandoned by his queen (Ryder), where he quietly returns to creating ice sculptures representing his passion and love for Winona. Now seventysomething, Winona Ryder quietly tells her fairy-tale story to her grandchild as we see the regret written all over her face.

Such a powerful yet entertaining vision: of the artist weaving human imperfection into fine gold, being discovered and superficially liked/tolerated, then being mistrusted, abused, and used, then finally being rejected and banished to a world of private isolation

where the only thing that remains is the serenity in which to create his art.

Such a sad story, yet one so effectively and sensitively told. Too bad most people never got it. But then again, perhaps Burton was biting the hand which feeds him.

THE WITCHES: 3.0

Nicholas Roeg, the British eccentric who directed The Man Who Fell To Earth and the haunting Don't Look Now, turns his talents toward the fairy tale and the result is a charming visual treat.

Focused around a marvelous performance by Mai Zetterling as the grandmother and Angelica Houston as the Queen Witch, this Roald Dahl story becomes a delightful scare-fest for all ages.

The marvelous first ten minutes, when the not quite kindly grandmother tells utterly horrifying tales to her enthralled grandson about the legend of witches (some great folklore is here marvelously created), weave a web of dread and woe which carries throughout the movie. Even after the witches transform two children (the first quite horrifyingly) into mice (puppet animation created by Jim Henson before his demise), the movie never becomes too cute or lame for its own good. Leading up to the grisly sequence whereby the witches, at their annual convention, ingest a soup which contains a transforming drug turning them all into mice, The Witches plays its mythical, fairy-tale vision straight and horrible.

Here, Nicholas Roeg concocts a marvelous, mythical world whose horrors seems real and threatening. The sense of fun and fright combine to produce a marvelous blend which will appeal to both children and adults.

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS: 3.0

Just as Hitchcock's Psycho became the artistic high-point of depicting the psychotic mind in cinema and redefined suspense cinema, many critics have claimed Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs further elevates the psycho/suspense thriller to new artistic highs for the 1990s. I don't think so.

Demme, who earlier in his career directed the Hitchcock influenced The Last Embrace, unlike Brian De Palma, flushed Hitchcock out of his system after only one movie. So in confronting The Silence of the Lambs director Demme, in returning to the suspense/thriller genre, did not wish to fall back upon Hitchcock. And true, his look into the psychotic mind is unnerving becoming an original vision. But as a total work of art, Hitchcock's Psycho still reigns supreme.

Let's discuss the primary strengths of the film: the acting interplay between Dr. Lector (Anthony Hopkins) and FBI agent Jody Foster. The sequences when Hopkins is on screen are mesmerizing. Actor Hopkins' mind-set intensity in capturing this demon in human skin is of Academy Award winning caliber. And while Foster's down-home character is more subtle and internal, her homely ambition and future goals are never very far below the surface.

Secondly, the visually trickery used to set up the ambiguity between the black pit of hell (in which a Senator's daughter is being readied for the slaughter) and the approaching FBI unit led by Scott Glenn, as they surround the house, is surprisingly and marvelously executed. Equally tense is Jody Foster's confrontation with the psycho alone in this house from hell as she gropes in the darkness and he sets his sights on her using infrared goggles. However, I see the strength of the movie in the acting more than I see superlative direction or cinematography. The suspense sequences are not as riveting as I had hoped. And while the set decoration of the cellar torture pit was engaging, to me it seemed more like a cliche, not innovative or at all like the fresher vision of hell concocted by director Tobe Hooper in his original Texas Chain Saw Massacre. For instance, since we saw the handgun on the table in the next room a minute before Foster draws her gun on the psycho, we immediately know that he will slip away into that next room and obtain possession of that gun. Little cliches like this bother me.

Even now, 30 years later, Hitchcock's Psycho is mercifully free of such flaws and still grips us by sheer power of ingenuity. While The Silence of the Lambs is one of the best horror thrillers in some time, it falls short of greatness. Much worse movies have featured more original visions of madness and mayhem. But oh, that performance by Anthony Hopkins may even out-psycho Anthony Perkins. It's that good!!!

Jason, by Koszowski, perhaps has been allowed to rest in peace as no more sequels are planned.

LIMITED RELEASE

SANTA SANGRE: 3.0

One of the original cult directors, Alexandro Jodorowski (El Topo), returns with true horror esoteria, the mesmerizing Santa Sangre.

This two-hour movie takes its time unfolding its bizarro tale of madness, and while the second half satisfies far more than the first half, upon repeated viewings the importance of that harder-to-warm-up-to first half becomes apparent.

Imagine that poetic, rhythmic style of the classic French horror classic Les Eyes Sans Visage adapted to the subject matter of either Michael Powell's Peeping Tom or Hitchcock's Psycho and this dubbed, Mexican gem emerges.

The central psychotic character grows up in the milieu of the circus, his hulking father, the circus knife thrower, arouses his mistress by throwing knives at her on the spinning wheel. His wife catches her husband in "the act" and in anger pours acid over his private parts; she in turn is tied to his spinning wheel as he severs her arms simultaneously with two blades. The father then slits his own throat. Such actions traumatize the male child.

Growing up, the now young man becomes, quite literally, his mother's arms, growing and manicuring long feminine fingernails as he always walks half a step behind mother, ready to pick up objects, lift a glass, or to eat at the table, all in perfect synch with mother's motions.

Believe it or not, by the film's conclusion several new surprises concerning what is real and what is not are further added to this complex mix.

While Santa Sangre is more enjoyable by its episodes than as a whole (one incredibly unnerving episode has institutionalized Down's Syndrome adult males given quantities of cocaine to sniff...as their reward and special treat), it is indeed a masterful image-laden look at madness. The film is both photographed and directed with innovation and style. This is certainly one of the most original horror dramas to come along in quite some time. But its casual pacing and lack of focus weakens its overall affect.

FRANKENHOOKER: 2.0

Frank Henenlotter, unlike his earlier teammate Sam Raimi, is not ready to graduate to the majors after a decade of producing inspired schlock cinema. Unfortunately, there's no Darkman to be found within Henenlotter at this point in his career.

After producing the inspired Basket Case in the early 1980s, his perchant for sleaze went haywire with Brain Damage, a film done in the same vein, a film that was either too comical or too sleazy, but never horrific nor involving enough.

Basket Case 2 revealed Henenlotter as the artist back on track with a wonderful follow-up (though inferior) to the creatively original Basket Case. In fact, the strongest

aspect of Basket Case 2 was the sense that Henenlotter was coming out of his sleazy urban morality and was producing something akin to a mainstream Hollywood horror film. But his concurrently produced film, Frankenhooker, takes the director deeper down the urban alleyway of soft-core sexism and perversity. Somehow half-naked New York City prostitutes gorging themselves on "super Crack" and literally catching fire and blowing up might impress some connoisseurs of trash cinema, but not me, at least not anymore.

Frank Henenlotter's tribute to Bride of Frankenstein's creation sequence and the wacky allusion to the Hermit sequence with "pretzels good!!!" was clever. But the film's "shocking" ending having Frankenhooker bring her beheaded boyfriend back to life by placing his head upon a grotesquely concocted (in the makeup studio) naked female body (of course with giant breasts that would embellish any 50-Foot Woman) just seems sophomoric. Perhaps my adolescent zest for sleaze has diminished with age, but hopefully, I too would have recognized the same banality 20 years ago that I see today.

Unfortunately, Frank Henenlotter mistakes fraternity hijinxs and gross-out lavatory humor for creativity, cleverness, and wit. And perhaps his intended audience absolutely loves such goings-on which might explain the difference between the inspired sleazoid director and the hack. Henenlotter can continue to appease the adolescent in all of us or he can return to his inspired and creepy motion picture debut which both shocked and challenged his audience. The choice is yours Frank Henenlotter.

HENRY: PORTRAIT OF A SERIAL KILLER: 2.5

Filmed in 1986 and only released last year, Henry has garnered lots of critical notice, much of it quite deservedly. Director John McNaughton recreates the visual equivalent of Bruce Springteen's Nebraska album trying to depict the explosive bad-seed serial killer Henry (Michael Rooker).

The first half of the film is fabulous, detaching the brooding, lonely, James Dean-esque performance of Rooker from the grisly deeds which Henry commits. In visually stunning vignettes, director McNaughton isolates the victims of violent brutality in quietly haunting segments, slowly closing in or slowly drawing away from frozen corpses. Towards the end of such sequences, in chilling voice-overs, we hear the final moments of struggle which eventually lead to the graphic, grisly violence flooding our eyes now.

And Henry, as portrayed by Rooker, is vulnerable, shy, and all-so-alone, yet gradually, his psychotic madness all so gracefully cracks through the surface: in small lies, violent outbursts, and anti-social utterances. It is a marvelously controlled performance.

Equally effective is his comrade-in-crime Tom Towles (who plays the good ol' boy Otis) and Tracy Arnold (who plays Otis' sister). For the first half of the film, the character interplay between these three misfits becomes riveting and does more to explain how a cold, uncaring society squeezes out broken, battered, defective human beings. It's intense.

But unfortunately, the second half of the film turns into a blood-splattered rampage of violence seemingly fulfilling the artistic demands of exploitative "B" cinema. Without rhyme nor reason Henry explodes and kills. At the end of the movie, after having killed both Otis and the sister, Henry dumps her body along the highway and rides away. To me, this statement that ungodly violence happens just isn't enough. Myself, I need some type of artistic statement or comment to connect to this senseless bloodshed. Here, I felt abandoned and feel that McNaughton only delivered half the job.

ROGER CORMAN'S FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND: 3.0

It sure is a thrill to see the grandmaster of schlock return to his directorial chair after a two-decade-long absence.

Corman's directorial style can be roughly broken down into two periods: low-budget black-and-white schlock (Little Shop of Horrors, Not of This Earth, Attack of the Crab Monsters) and slightly higher low-budget color (Masque of the Red Death, X, The Man With X-Ray Eyes, Pit and The Pendulum). With the best of his color work, Corman forsaked his poverty row humor for serious pretensions (the artsy finale of Masque of the Red Death). And, fortunately, Frankenstein Unbound, with a nod to his New World Pictures days, continues where he left off 20 years ago. Pretensions abound, but they never get in the way of good, clean, schlocky fun. While Frankenstein Unbound is not a great film, it is indeed a creative, imaginative hoot in the best Corman tradition.

Corman manages to get inspired, over-the-top performances from both John Hurt and Raul Julia (Vincent Price is a little too frail these days), but the movie manages to entertain because of its wildly fabricated scenario (sci-fi meets horror as guilty weapons-creator of the future is catapulted into the Romantic Period of Europe's past), its marvelous special effects (very effective matte paintings of futuristic city landscapes and cloud-effects representing the warp in time), and its energetic direction (some sequences seem ridiculously isolated yet they work in the overall framework of the whole).

The only major flaw to be found is Corman's confronting the world of gore and splatter. While Corman avoids (by cutting away) showing the inevitable sexual interlude, he succumbs to depicting a few sequences of arms being torn off, blood sprewing forth. This is not Corman's style and such gratuitous concessions to modern taste are not necessary.

Frankenstein Unbound is not Universal, nor is it Hammer, but it is Drive-In entertainment of the best sort, free of the ineptitude of acting and the over-use of soft-core nudity which has artistically submerged the once great "B" horror genre. Roger Corman, welcome back. The 1990s need you like never before!

CINEMA PARADISO: 4.0

Okay, okay, this is not a horror/fantasy film by any stretch of the imagination. But it is a wonderful, well-crafted, and sensitive look at the world of cinema. No, this is not a retrospective "let's-look-back" stockfootage compilation. Instead, it is the answer to the question movie buffs always get asked: "Hey, what's really the appeal of movies???" From now on simply tell such inquisitive individuals, "See Cinema Paradiso!"

This Italian film won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film last year, and it is now available in both a dubbed and subtitled version on videotape (see the subtitled version...very easy to read).

Cinema Paradiso connects the movie-viewing experience to lasting friendship, falling in love, setting goals for your future life, and for transcending the horrors of one's current environment. But on a more personal level, it is the story of a highly successful man reflecting upon his life after receiving a phone call from his mother who informs him that Alfredo, the village's former projectionist, just died. This man, who hasn't been home in 30 years, must become reconciled with his past life before he can return home. And the essence of his entire life revolves around Alfredo and the Cinema Paradiso.

Such a description cannot do justice to the film. But director Guiseppe Tornatore has created an affecting vision of the importance of cinema to both our personal lives and to society as a whole. Simply put, if movies mean anything to your life, rush out to rent or buy Cinema Paradiso. It is truly a movie for all time.

John Carradine, stylized by Knox, from House of Dracula.

METAMORPHOSIS: THE ALIEN FACTOR:

Perhaps not everyone realizes that new MidMar staff member Ted A. Bohus is a producer/special effects creator who resides in quaint Palisades Park, New Jersey. Producer Bohus, about one decade ago, released his first low-budget science fiction monster film with The Deadly Spawn. That terrific little special effects package was a hoot, boasting slimy pod monsters that simply looked too good for a film that was made on a shoe-string. Producer Bohus, always the perfectionist, wanted to redo the original in a slightly higher low-budget format. Thus, the birth of Metamorphosis.

Simply stated, the film, made for less than one million dollars, looks like it were made for five times that budget. While the acting is standard-adequate, the cinematography, the editing (a real strength), and the special effects (simply outrageously stunning much in the way that the brain creatures from Fiend Without A Face caught us all off-guard in the fifties!) are superlative. Metamorphosis makes us forget that the era of the 1950s' monster movies has passed as this film is a loving tribute to those mutated-monsters-are-loose-in-the-lab style entertainment which many of us "oldsters" grew up enjoying.

Besides Ted Bohus, kudos go to writer/director Glenn Takakjian for keeping the pace rapid-fire and to the creator of special visual effects, Maryland's own Dan Taylor, a Harryhausen disciple to watch for in the future.

And unlike other independent monster movies that can only afford to bombard the screen with lavish effects during the final reel, Metamorphosis splatters the screen with creeping, crawling ooze consistently throughout.

Since Bohus is a close friend and staff member, conflict of interest prevents me from rating this production. But I heartily feel that my enthusiasm will be shared by all who see Metamorphosis!

THE CHURCH: 2.5

This much ballyhooed Italian production, "presented" and "co-scripted" by legendary Dario Argento and directed by Michele Soavi, seems like another installment in the infamous Demons series which Argento also produced but did not direct.

The Church's strength emanates from its wonderful gothic sets (the interior and underbelly of the church itself are masterful and creepy) and many visual sequences of horror (the original sequence in the church's cellar where the librarian lifts the portal in the center of the cement cross built into the floor, blue mist flowing from this ancient manhole cover, are indeed scary. It is to Argento and Soavi's credit: they weave a web of gloom and horror that is 100 per cent serious without any traces of camp or comedy.

Yet The Church ultimately becomes a cliche of the Argento workbook: during the conclusion all the various "innocents" become locked in the church as victim after victim is turned into a ravishing demon who slaughters/converts others into similar creatures of the night (all in rapid-fire gore-heavy sequences). By the film's end, as everyone lies dead, the only surviving child is exposed to evil and the ambiguous ending implies that the evil will continue with her. Come on, folks, how original!!

The acting, negatively affected by dubbing, has never been a strong aspect of a typical Argento production, but here, the visual sensibilities and gothic-slaughter pacing are somewhat listless. Expecting a visceral wallop, the audience instead receives a slight smack across the chops. And often in place of developing a much needed plot, Soavi spends far too much time creating mood and menace to the point of tedium.

Although Italian films have a style and momentum all to themselves, The Church appears to lack the originality that made, say, Demons such a riveting and original horror gem. Instead it seems that today even the Italians are constantly repeating the glories of the past.

CIRCUITRY MAN: 2.5

Another one of those post-holocaust adventure science fiction epics which have been released direct to video over the last couple of years, Circuitry Man is a step above.

An interesting premise: image a war-riddled world where people must wear oxygen tanks on the surface because the atmosphere has almost been burned away by abuse. And in this world imagine individuals looking for the ultimate "high." No, not drugs but micro-chips and circuits which allow human beings to create euphoric mind-trips by merging the organic with the mechanical. In fact, such circuitry allows human beings to become "one" with automobiles (driving and steering by thought control alone) and/or any mechanical device. And imagine organized crime controls such electronic paraphernalia.

The marvelous villain of the piece, Plughead (the master of biological/mechanical merging, masterfully enacted by Aussie Vernon Wells), goes head-to-toe with a mechanical clone (Jim Metzler) who has been cruelly programmed to think his true lady love awaits him on the other side of the U.S. The sex-appeal interest comes from Dana Wheeler Nicholson, a mercenary female, who comes to fall in love with the android (who is programmed to sexually satisfy women).

Of course, by movie's end the android truly becomes the most "human" of all the characters as Plughead represents the total lost of humanity to technologically and superficially induced pleasures. As for Nicholson, her hard metallic outer sheen is melted by the love and self-sacrificing kindnesses generated by drone Metzler. Even in the dehumanized world of the future, where the environment lies devastated, love keeps us human and whole. An interesting little picture.

WHISPERS: 2.5

Dean R. Koontz is one of the most prolific and popular novelists of horror writing today, but unlike the better known Stephen King, Koontz' literature has been largely ignored by Hollywood until Watchers was filmed a few years ago (direct-to-video) in a simplified, bastardized version.

Fortunately, Koontz' reputation fairs much better with this tense, psychological horror thriller. Director Douglas Jackson, working with an accomplished professional cast including stalked victim/survivor Victoria Tennant, cop/love interest Chris Sarandon, and intense fiend Jean Leclerc.

The first half-hour of the film works best when innocent authoress Victoria Tennant is stalked, attacked twice by obsessed fiend Bruno (Jean Leclerc). One sequence is an edge of the seat classic. After being attacked initially and repelling the assailant, the police having arrived and left, Tennant prepares for bed but wisely moves her dresser in front of her bedroom door. Silently, during the middle of the night, the psycho returns and tries to pry the bedroom door open. Sensing the weight of an object against her door, the fiend, after taping his mouth shut to avoid making sleeping noises, sits down right outside her bedroom waiting for her to remove the dresser at dawn's light. When the next morning finally arrives, the audience sees the entire course of events from Tennant's eyes so we are expecting the fiend to pop out at her at any second.

The film's second half slows up a bit, weighed down by an overly complex plot involving a mysterious wealthy family, incest, twins, and the childhood tortures of being thrown into a room with whispering black insects which completely cover the "punished" individual.

Although saturated with cliches from psycho movies of the past, Whispers succeeds because of its strong performances (Victoria Tennant's resolve to never be frightened out of her home tied to her cleverness in outsmarting her attacker avoid the typical female stereotypes usually associated with such roles) and the nail-biting suspense generated by director Douglas Jackson.

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

SPACE MASTER X-7
RETURN OF DRACULA
Available from The Fang, P.O. Box 804, Flushing, New York 11375 for $15.00 (plus $2.95 for shipping).

The Fang Video is one of my favorite independent video companies. The reason I recommend The Fang is because the majority of his titles are mastered from 16mm (sometimes 35mm) print sources and are professionally film-chained directly from the original print material. Thus, the video tape quality is the best available. I have dealt personally with the company and I highly recommend them to all enthusiasts. A catalog is available for $1.00 (refundable with video tape order).

This issue I chose to review two of the rarer Fang releases: Space Master X-7 and Return of Dracula.

Space Master X-7, directed in 1958 by Edward Bernds, is a gem of low-budget monster sci-fi. Fang Video, following the lead from laser discs, formatted his video copy in the CinemaScope letterbox format, thus preserving the original widescreen aspect of the 16mm scope print. The movie itself is wonderful. Earthlings, occupying a space station, are invaded by fungus-formed monsters who threaten to destroy all inhabitants aboard. The suspenseful men-against-monster sequences are real fun. And be sure to look for Three Stooges' Moe Howard's small performance as a cab driver. Rare low-budget schlock at its wildest.

And I have been searching out a decent video copy of United Artists' Return of Dracula for years. While The Fang's excellent video copy does not feature the colored staking footage found on 35mm prints, this low-budget gem, neglected by being the other Dracula movie released in 1958, is a wonderful horror romp. Francis Lederer performs masterfully as the modern-day Count Dracula weaving his invitation to young ladies to join him in the darkness of the undead. This movie manages to blend nostalgia for the small-town innocence of the 1950s with the gothic horror suspense (lots of fog, mysterious quick-cut entrances, demon-possessed dogs, coffins in deserted mine shafts) needed to make horror involving. Seldom shown anymore on TV, this is a must to buy.

BLACK-AND-WHITE HORROR TRAILERS: VOL. 5
COLOR HORROR TRAILERS: VOL. 10
Available from Cinemacabre Video, P.O. Box 10005, Baltimore, MD 21285 for $19.95 each (plus $2.00 per order for shipping).

Cinemacabre Video, operated by George Stover, Jr., is my personal favorite independent home video distributor. His recent catalog is available for the asking. The quality of the product is the best I have seen from any of the smaller, independent outfits.

Sometimes a typical movie buff is not in the mood to devote 90-minutes to sit down and watch one feature, yet the urge persists to confront some sort of cinematic experience. Can't decide whether to watch that magical serial, that cherished classic horror, or what about one of those favorite "B" schlock gems? Well, by purchasing Cinemacabre Video's Trailer Treasury (the company now has over 25 trailer reels available, each running at least 80 minutes long, sub-divided either by theme or chronologically, sold either in the color or black-and-white variety), the avid movie buff can watch snatches of all the above! Cinemacabre's Video Treasury contains trailer reels mastered directly from 16mm and 35mm print material. Professionally film-chained under George Stover's personal supervision and high standards, Cinemacabre offers the best quality trailer reels I ever saw (and the vast amount of trailers available mean all those minor gems are also available, not just the basic classic material).

For instance, I just previewed Cinemacabre's Black-and-While Horror Trailers Vol. 5, a tape running over 80-minutes long featuring over 50 black-and-white trailers. The reel begins with a re-release trailer of The Adventures of Captain Marvel (a classic Republic serial) and ends with The Devil's Daffodil, a rare British horror/crime drama starring Christopher Lee (from classic title to neglected gem, all here on one reel).

"Yeah, this one will kill you!" proclaims the trailer to Beach Girls and The Monster (with music by Frank Sinatra, Jr.!). The campy trailer of The Crawling Hand contains the classic schlock rock 'n' roll song "Surfer Bird" ("The bird is the word")

Return of the Fly (by Knox) is one trailer among thousands to be purchased from Cinemacabre Video.

playing over the soundtrack as a disembodied hand stranglers numerous victims.

And who will ever forget country crooner Johnny Cash singing "You've got five minutes to live" to his next victim as part of the trailer of Cash's starring role in Door-to-Door Maniac. Face of Terror trailer proclaims "a woman's flesh, a killer's soul; female, yes—but was she really woman?" Gimmicks abound with the trailer of The Manchurian Candidate ("If you're five minutes late you won't know what this movie's about!") and Scream of Fear ("Hers is the only face we're allowed to show" as we close in on the frozen-frame closeup of a woman's face as she screams). Even The Strangler trailer refers to the then-current search for the infamous Boston Strangler. This black-and-white volume is a minor gem.

The Color Horror Trailers Vol. 5 is also a treat. Appealing to those more modern genre fans, this collection starts with Steve Reeve's Goliath and the Barbarians and travels through the recent Tremors. However, the emphasis is on those marvelously tacky 1970s' "B" films such as The Corpse Grinders and The Undertakers and His Pals whereby the trailer proclaims patrons must sign a "Certificate of Assurance" so the producer will not be liable if theater-goers die from shock. Earlier, the trailer reel features an "Orgy of the Dead" triple-feature trailer that starts with one John Austin Frazer, a raving, strait-jacketed asylum inmate, who went bonkers after seeing the "World Premiere" of this lively triple-bill. Thus, the producers offer patrons an insurance policy offering to pay for lifelong commitment if patrons go insane from seeing the movies.

This trailer reel offers glimpses of some of my favorite modern horror films: Private Parts, Sisters, Deranged, Alien, Nosferatu, and The Howling, to name a few. And even the schlock classic, Dracula Vs. Frankenstein, complete with full endorsement from Famous Monsters magazine, appears (with editor Ackerman's death sequence directly following the endorsement!). Trailer reels often contain the best sequences from an otherwise forgettable feature, and Cinemacabre Video offers the best selection of horror/science fiction trailers available.

LASERDISC RELEASE

EYES WITHOUT A FACE (THE CINEMADISC COLLECTION) is available from Image Entertainment ($39.98): In French with English Subtitles, Extended Play, Digital Sound.

Until now, this movie has only been available from Sinister Cinema Video in both the dubbed English and French subtitled versions.

While Image's laserdisc version may have been mastered from the same negative from which the Sinister Cinema version originated, the laserdisc version looks infinitely better

most likely because of the professional transfer equipment utilized.

Thus, the gorgeous black-and-white cinematography and eerie, off-beat Maurice Jarre score comes through as never before seen and heard. Still one of the most disturbing horror movies ever mounted, Eyes Without A Face manages to hold the viewer spellbound because of its stark imagery, the juxtaposition of wild beauty (the angelic Edith Scob wearing white clothes and china-mask framed by white doves) and savage horror (the time-lapse shots showing the slow, savage disintegration of her face). For those who never saw this rare horror classic, this laserdisc version is the absolute best quality now available.

THE BAT WHISPERS from Image Entertainment ($39.98): Extended Play, Digital Sound.

Long considered lost, this 1930 horror film treasure has been restored and is offered on laserdisc in pristine condition. For those unfamiliar with The Bat Whispers, the film was most recently refilmed as The Bat in 1959 with Vincent Price. It is the story of a mysterious thief/murderer known as "The Bat," a man who dresses in mysterious bat-like clothing who terrorizes the occupants of a large mansion in the process of looking for hidden treasure. Starring Chester Morris, Gustav Von Seyffertitz, and Una Merkel, The Bat Whispers stands as one of the best of the mystery/haunted house/horror thrillers. Roland West's direction is embellished by modernistic cinematography involving the use of quick dolly and crane shots involving fantastic miniature sets and props. Wonderfully spooky and effective, this is a must for any laserdisc owner.

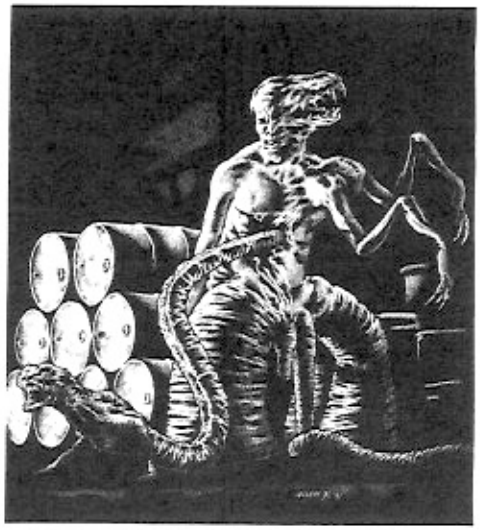
DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE from MGM/UA ($39.98): Extended Play, Digital Sound.

For me, Mamoulian's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has always been one of my favorite horror classics. Fredric March's dual performance, especially his Mr. Hyde, stands as one of the most magnificent acting performances, bar none, in cinema history. After viewing truncated versions of this classic for far too many years, at last the "restored uncensored" version has been released to laser. Clocking in at almost 100-minutes and containing an absolutely breathtaking video transfer, the Mamoulian classic has never looked nor sounded (via cleaned up remastered digital sound) better. This is another must-have addition to any video collection.

BLACK SUNDAY/BLACK SABBATH is available from Image Entertainment ($59.98): Extended Play, Digital Sound.

The best two features ever directed by Italian Mario Bava are at last available on a double-disc, double-feature offering pristine original source material and mastering.

Black Sunday, here available in its complete Americanized version (with Les Baxter score), comes complete with its American-International introduction. The transfer work is stunning and perfectly captures



This alien concept was cut from Carpenter's theatrical release of The Thing. By Koszowski.

superior original source material utilized to bring this classic to disc. Black Sabbath, also superior in its transfer and original source material, can boast of terrific color (as most 16mm prints of this 1963 classic are turning shades of red). The first sequence, "A Drop of Water," is perhaps one of the most chilling sequences ever put on film. Bava's use of photography, quick-cut editing, and the creative use of sound make this the standout segment of the entire movie.

Once again, the Image laserdisc is the absolute best way to again enjoy these two horror classics.

CARNIVAL OF SOULS is available from Image Entertainment ($39.98): Extended Play, Digital Sound, Chapter Encoded.

Anyone who saw the recently restored (the Director's Cut) version of Carnival of Souls in the theaters realizes just how stunning this low-budget film looked with revitalized prints made from new negatives. The resulting video cassette version bragged of offering an introduction with director Herk Harvey which never materialized.

For fans who wanted that exclusive introduction by Herk Harvey and also wanted to enjoy the most pristine print of the movie available, go out and buy the laserdisc version of Carnival of Souls because it is all here.

Simply stated, Carnival of Souls has never looked nor sounded better, and the brief introduction with director Harvey, very campy done tongue-in-cheek, is an extra bonus well worth having.

BLUE VELVET is available from Warner Home Video ($29.98): Extended Play, Letterboxed (Widescreen), Stereo, Digitally Processed.

Blue Velvet for me was one of my favorite films of the past decade: weird, nightmarish, surreal, and definitely qualifying as a horror film. But nothing prepared me for this absolutely stunning transfer to laserdisc in the original aspect widescreen ratio. The panned-and-scanned video cassette version available until now was much too dark and cropped off the edges of director's David Lynch's cinematic visions. This letterboxed laserdisc transfer, as one friend eagerly told me, looks better at home than it did in the theaters.

The entire laserdisc experience—the synthesis of the visual, the sound (magnificent Dolby surround sound)—makes this disc one to use as an in-store test when considering purchasing a laserdisc unit. And with the 30 dollar price tag, can anyone afford not to own this modern horror classic?

EDITORIAL continued from Page 31

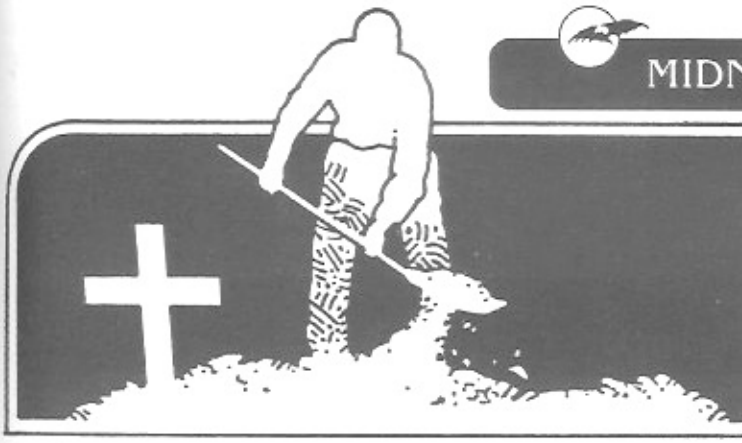
will remain in the forefront of the MidMar art staff by submitting wonderful color back covers and interior art.

But do not worry, Midnight Marquee will preserve those wonderful qualities which helped us to establish our reputation over these last 28 years. But change is healthy. These changes in design and layout, the use of graphics and art (the Macintosh can produce some incredible graphics), and the shifting in editorial content will, hopefully, produce a magazine more in line with what MidMar readers wish to see and read in an ever-escalating explosion of media (videotapes and laserdiscs coming out faster than ever before). The change begins this issue, but wait until you receive the next one. I promise you that those special qualities which have been enjoyed within our pages will continue. Yet, any magazine has to constantly reinvent itself to avoid becoming stagnant and out-of-touch with the times. MidMar is simply evolving, hopefully in the proper direction. Hang in there with us...enjoy the ride!!!

Also, isn't it wonderful that RCA/Columbia and Cinemax are finally releasing the American International Pictures Drive-In package to home cable and video (can laser be far behind?). Interestingly, during the first week of July Cinemax offered five A.I.P. horror classics at 6:30 p.m. during its "Chillers" week. Each movie was introduced by wonderfully campy Samuel Z. Arkoff (surviving head of the company), who, with giant cigar, threatens to become the media darling of the psychotronic generation (much the same way we loved William Castle during the 1960s). Cinemax, keep it coming.

And finally, may I add that my editorial on laservision and laserdiscs attracted the biggest mail response to our editorial offices ever. This is wonderful. I hope that readers continue to consider MidMar as a forum to discuss home video and laserdiscs. Tell us what you think of the quality. What are titles to avoid, titles that you consider "must-haves?" MidMar exists for such quality-control discussions. Get involved. Write us!!!

Gary J. Svehla



MIDNIGHT MARQUEE

GRAVE DIGGINGS

Dear Gary:

I will never be one of MidMar's detractors that accuse you of being stuck in the past, but I would really like to see coverage of newer films. The Val Lewton Legacy series has been well written and researched enough to shed more light on these fabulous films, but the subject is getting a bit staid: I mean, exactly how much more is going to be written about the subject? The articles on the Planet of the Apes series and Protelco productions were a refreshing change of pace from the reoccurring retro feel of MidMar's current nostalgic painted corner.

I took great exception to your statement "videocassettes are for the masses, the casual movie-goer..." No one can dispute the real advantages of laservision over video, but don't you think that statement smacks a bit of "laser-elitism"? I have been collecting and trading video for nigh on 10 years now, and I am fastly approaching the 2000 film mark. I would hardly label myself a "casual movie-goer": Would you consider the Tim Lucases and Craig Ledbetters of fandom to be "casual movie-goers"? Were you yourself just a "casual movie-goer" before getting your laserdisc setup? You may want to rethink those statements.

Oliver Reed from Hammer's Curse of the Werewolf by Koszowksi.

Well, now that I'm on a rant, there's the point of your movie review column. From the recent slew of titles you've been reviewing of late, one could almost call you a "casual movie-goer!" You only seem to review mega-budget major film releases these days. There are a lot of smaller releases out there that deserve a little recognition or word of mention. Please don't fall into the trap of pandering to the major studios in the same ways that other semi-pro zines have.

One last bitch (bear with me, I'm on a roll here). I'd really like to see some of the beautiful stills you feature accompanying your articles reproduced a bit larger, as well as some of the illustrations. A good example would be Koszowski's beautiful Predator illo on page 43...

Barry Wooldridge, Hollcman, NM

[From the Editor: Perhaps I was a tad harsh on video tape collectors and I apologize. But when all my friends were rushing out to buy pre-recorded copies of tapes and making high-grade SLP copies from cable, I was content to record LP copies and pass on all prerecorded titles. Why? Video tape will eventually turn to static, as have many early cassettes recorded by friends in the late 1970s and even early 1980s. Serious collectors collect for all time, and video cassettes are primarily for the here and now. Anyone seriously concerned with a collection which lasts should seriously consider laser-discs. Barry, we have revamped our Movie Review column because you were absolutely correct...I was going mainstream and ignoring the independents. Your letter made me do some heavy thinking and I hope I am now on track. Comments? Also, again, Barry we have taken your advice by changing our layout format to allow a larger reproduction of photos and art. At MidMar we do listen. Thanks for your comments!!!]

Dear Gary:

Congrats on going with laser. Your system is similar to mine...you're in for a treat! My family test-marketed the Phillips players back in 1978, so I've seen these things progress from "potentially great" to "fan-damn-tastic!"

What I wanted to write about was software. Thought I'd warn you about a few crummy ones and roll out some real gems. My favorites are the Universal horrors—all the lasers of these are incredible! Try the restored '31 Dracula. You'll swear you'd never seen it before. I would have killed for some color test footage on Son of Frankenstein, but you can't have everything.

On to Corman, my favorite film icon above all others. The Raven has some sound synch problems and looks like it was transferred from a 16mm print. So avoid this one. The Masque of the Red Death/Premature Burial double-feature is much better, but letterboxing would have been nice.

The '51 The Thing from VidAmerica was from 16mm, so wait for the new one that Image is about to release. The VidAmerica one is uncut (86 minutes) but has splices.

I'm going to go with a list now of stuff I recommend. I have all of these, and they really do the film justice and show what a Godsend the laserdisc can be.

Here goes. The Gorgon: God, what color! 2001: from Criterion contains Overture and Intermission music and is letterboxed. Some of the best surround sound I've heard. Tremors: Fun movie, fabulous sound. Dr. Phibes double-bill: color could be more vivid, otherwise very nice. Blue Velvet: the new letterboxed one. Looks better on disc than it did in the theater, actually! Poltergeist: Deluxe letterboxed one...fantastic sound. Legend of Hell House: a little sound noise, but very sharp. Curse of the Demon: This and all the Val Lewton discs are great!

But watch out for Kronos...the pan and scan just reeks! The worst disc ever is It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World, one of my favorite movies. But a restored print is on the way.

By the way, you'll hate videotape in a few months and will find yourself renting trashy stuff on laserdisc because it has surround sound or is letterboxed. I did this with Roadhouse...the worst night of my life!

Toby Roan, Durham, NC

Dear Gary:

A year ago, when I purchased a Pioneer 3030 combi player and installed it in my stereo system and played my first disc (the Criterion Wizard of Oz), my reaction was about as positive as yours. I was not ready to declare the laserdisc the prefect artifact that "never wears out and looks and sounds as good the 80th time played as the first time," but the quality of the image and the sound

(with my stereo system) was certainly superior to any reproduction I had seem of VHS cassettes.

However, this past August I began experiencing major problems with the disc player and deterioration of the image as well as intermittent malfunctioning of the CD component of the combi player. Since then, the player has gone in for warranty repairs three times but today, sever months later, the player is still performing erratically and I have sent a long letter to Pioneer's CEO asking for a refund or a replacement. I have yet to receive a reply from Pioneer.

I suspect that you will continue to be delighted with your new system and the laser disc even though you will find great variations in quality of the film transfers. (The "restored" Selznick Adventures of Tom Sawyer is only marginally better than the poor VHS version, and the Alastair Sim Christmas Carol is unwatchable, to name only two poor quality releases.). My present feeling about the laser disc is that its principal strength is in the indexing function which gives you rapid access to specific sections of films. But as the technology improves, I may be again convinced that the laser disc is, indeed, the major breakthrough in home viewing it promises to be.

Walter Albert, Pittsburgh, PA

[From the Editor: Thanks for sharing your bad experiences with laservision. Myself, I had my new stereo surround amplifier in the shop twice for repairs, but the problem was resolved to my complete satisfaction. To all readers, please consider MidMar as a forum to share opinions of current laserdiscs and video cassettes and offer recommendations and warnings. In this manner the MidMar network can be of special service to disc/tape fans everywhere.]

Dear Gary:

Interesting to see Ed Bansak describe Isle of the Dead as the only loser in the group of Lewton films reviewed. I personally do not share his opinion and find the film infinitely superior to Bedlam with some truly scary scenes to rival the famous ones from Cat People. What may interest your readers and Bansak to know is that Boris Karloff much preferred making Isle of the Dead because he was not happy with the too-irreverent approach to the subject of Bedlam, requiring from him a near-comic performance that was out of keeping with the theme.

To John Duvoli, I can only express my thanks for giving Protelco Productions one more shot in the limelight. I agree with you completely about Gremlins II which could have been a roaring box-office success if released at a different time with a better campaign. For myself, however, I found nothing in Dick Tracy that was worth the price of admission, not even its much-acclaimed look. Buy a Ralph Byrd cassette of a Republic serial to find out what Dick Tracy was really all about!

Glad to read your appraisal of LaserVision, although only time will tell whether laserdiscs will really never wear out

One of the great modern horror films--Re-Animator--by Koszowski.

as opposed to 16mm prints and cassette copies. Republic Pictures will be coming out with a laserdisc of Fiend Without A Face this year, the first of my films to reach that media. And Fiend also now becomes our first "merchandised" movie via a licensed model kit that a very reputable new company called GEOmetric Design is now bringing out. Sam Arkoff—Move over!!!

Richard Gordon, New York, NY

[From the Editor: Both Richard Gordon and GEOmetric Design will be appearing at FANEX 5 this August 10-11. Here's a chance to buy the model kit and have it signed by Mr. Gordon.]

Dear Gary:

As you know our horror and science fiction movies go in cycles, and when people in the '30s were questioning the advances of modern science and medicine and our culture still believed in ghosts and goblins, we had movies like Frankenstein, The Invisible Man, and zombie movies. As people were coming down from WWII and atomic power was the new evil and man was experimenting in things the movies said he shouldn't be, we saw movies like Them, Amazing Colossal Man, Fiend Without A Face, The Incredible Shrinking Man, etc. where everyone shrank or grew to 50 feet tall or glowed or became invisible. By the '70s, with Norman Bates planted in our minds, we saw real people like Ted Bundy and Charles Manson in the news and discovered the real enemy, ourself. This spawned Jason, Freddy, Michael, and the chainsaw family. As it usually takes 20 years to run a cycle, I predict the new menace which should take us into the 21st century is our most common fear today, the fear of a disease for which there is no cure (i.e. AIDS or cancer). I just read of a man holding up a bank with no weapon except a hypodermic filled with what he said was his AIDS infested blood. It in fact scared people more than an M-16 rifle. The next wave of horror movies will be about scientists or madmen holding us hostage or killing us off with a germ. I do remember The Andromeda Strain, and if the new movies can be half as good as that one, we will have some good viewing.

Publishing a good magazine like Midnight Marquee is fast becoming a lost art.

Larry Summerson, Donna, NC

Dear Readers of MidMar:

It seems the art staff at Midnight Marquee is dwindling all the time. I encourage readers to submit art to MidMar for the following reasons:

1. It is crucial to learn how your art reproduces and how to listen to an editor's criticisms if you want to succeed in art. Contributing art to MidMar serves as a learning opportunity. Gary is extremely supportive but gives honest comments on how to improve your art.

2. Gary's enthusiasm is contagious. I respect his dedication and commitment to put out a high-quality publication.

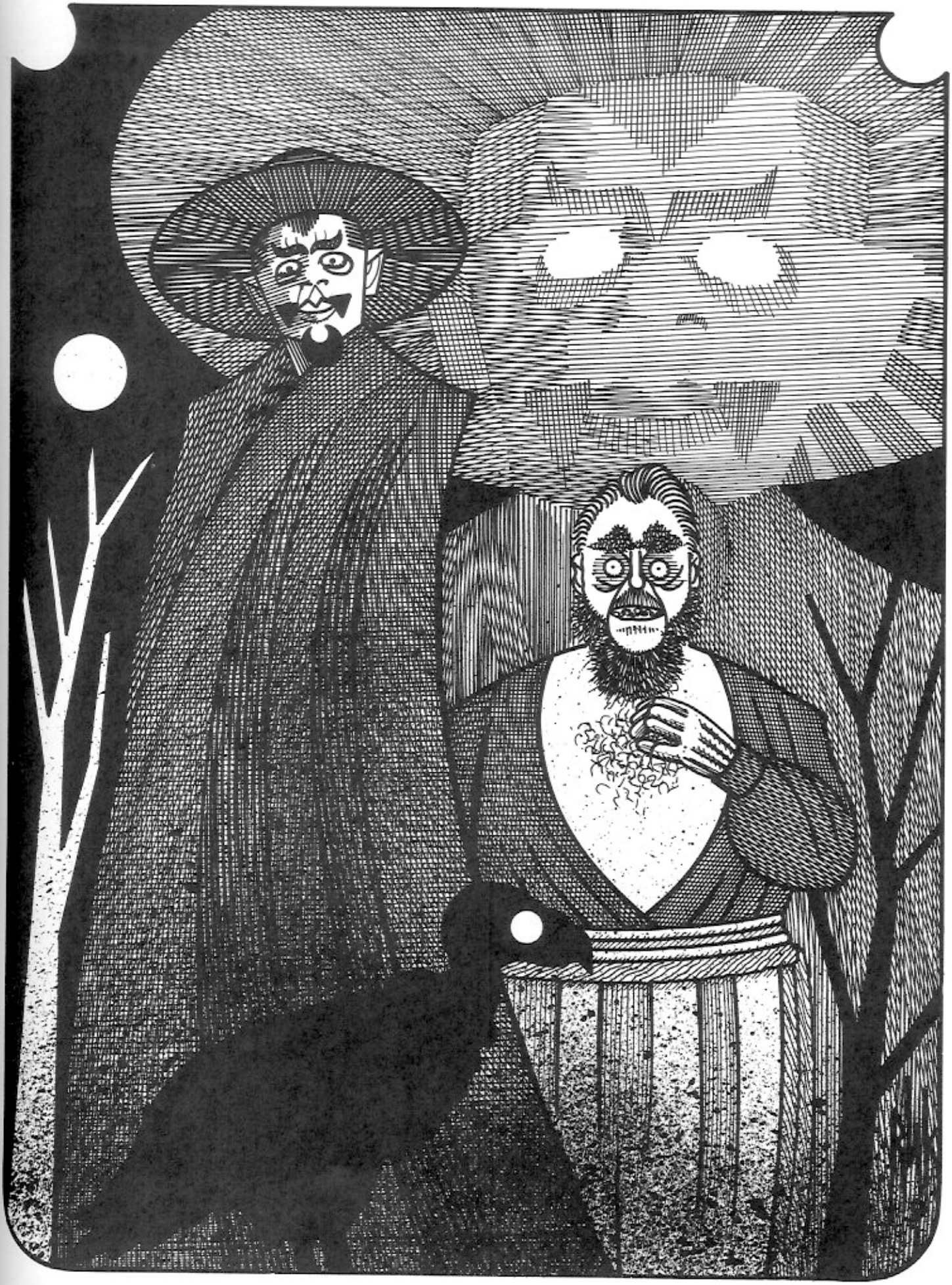
3. It is fun to draw subjects based on movies you like.

Please, give it a try!

David L. Daniels, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

MIDNIGHT MARQUEE BACK ISSUES: The following Back Issues are available for $4.50 each: Numbers 31, 32, 33, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41. A few copies of our 25th Anniversary issue (208 pages) are available $16.50 postpaid. Extremely rare #19 sells for $15. Professional Photocopies of the following out-of-print issues sell for $10 apiece: Numbers 13-18, 20-30, 34, and 36. Photo copies of requested articles cost 40 cents per page (Table of Contents of all our issues available upon request for $1.00 to cover postage). Write to Richard Svehla, 4000 Glenarm Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21206 [phone: 301-426-1205].

MIDNIGHT MARQUEE #43, available Fall 1991, will reveal the entirely newly redesigned, Macintosh created MidMar for the '90s. And not just the look of the magazine will be upgraded and improved. Possible articles include: THE KEEP: PAGE-TURNER HOBBLES TO THE SCREEN; ITALIAN-AMERICAN RECONCILIATION: WALKING THE CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD; THE FANTASTIC ASIAN VIDEO INVASION: HOPPING VAMPIRES, ANNOYING ALIENS, AND ATOMIC CATS!; THE GUARDIAN AS MYTHOLOGY; AN ANALYSIS OF DAY THE WORLD ENDED; SCOTT WILSON ON GRAVESITES OF HORROR CELEBRITIES; CHRISTOPHER LEE ON HORROR SINCE HAMMER; THE RICHARD GORDON STORY; BARBARA STEELE INTERVIEWED, etc. Remember, a two-issue American subscription costs just $8.00 (a savings of one dollar under cover price!). Your support keeps us going!!!



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